Karl Jaspers

PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

Philosophy has from its very beginnings looked upon itself as science, indeed as science *par excellence*. To achieve the highest and most certain knowledge is the goal that has always animated its devotees.

How its scientific character came to be questioned can be understood only in the light of the development of the specifically modern sciences. These sciences made their greatest strides in the nineteenth century, largely outside philosophy, often in opposition to philosophy, and finally in an atmosphere of indifference to it. If philosophy was still expected to be a science, it was in a different sense than before: it was now expected to be a science in the same sense as those modern sciences that convince by virtue of their accomplishments. If it were unable to do so, it was argued, it had become pointless and might just as well die out.

Some decades ago, the opinion was widespread that philosophy had had its place up to the moment when all the sciences had become independent of it, the original universal science. Now that all possible fields of research have been marked off, the days of philosophy are over. Now that we know how science obtains its universal validity, it has become evident that philosophy cannot stand up against judgment by these criteria. It deals in empty ideas, because it sets up undemonstrable hypotheses, it disregards experience, it seduces by illusions, it takes possession of energies needed for genuine investigation, and squanders them in empty talk about the whole.

This was the picture of philosophy as seen against science conceived as methodical, cogent, universally valid insight. Under such circumstances, could any philosophy legitimately claim to be scientific? To this situation philosophy reacted in two ways:

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1) The attack was regarded as justified. Philosophers withdrew to limited tasks. If philosophy is at an end because the sciences have taken over all its subject matter, there remains nevertheless the knowledge of its history, first as a factor in the history of the sciences themselves, then as a phenomenon in the history of thought, the history of the errors, the anticipated insights, the process of liberation by which philosophy has made itself superfluous. Finally, the history of philosophy must preserve the knowledge of the philosophical texts, if only for their aesthetic interest. Although these texts do not make any serious contribution to scientific truth, they are nevertheless worth reading for the sake of their style and the intellectual attitude they reflect.

Others paid tribute to the modern scientific trend by rejecting all previous philosophy and striving to give philosophy an exact scientific foundation. They seized upon questions which, they claimed, were reserved for philosophy because they concerned all the sciences, namely, logic, epistemology, phenomenology. In an effort to refurbish its reputation, philosophy became a servile imitator, a handmaiden to the sciences. It proceeded to establish in theory the validity of scientific knowledge, which was not questioned anyhow. But in the field of logic it developed a specialized science which, because of the universality of its purpose, i.e., to define the form of all true thinking, to provide a *mathesis universalis*, seemed capable of replacing all previous philosophy. Today many thinkers regard symbolic logic as the whole of philosophy.

This first reaction seems today to have given rise to the view that philosophy is a science among other sciences, a discipline among other disciplines. And like the others, it is carried on by specialists, it has its narrow circle of experts, its congresses, and its learned periodicals.

2) In opposition to this infatuation with science, there has been a second reaction. Philosophy attempted to save itself from destruction by dropping its claim to scientific knowledge. Philosophy—according to this view—is not a science at all. It is based on feeling and intuition, on imagination and genius. It is conceptual magic, not knowledge. It is *élan vital* or resolute acceptance of death. Indeed, some went further and said: it does not behoove philosophy to concern itself with science, since it is aware that all scientific truth

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is questionable. The modern sciences are altogether in error, witness the ruinous consequences for the soul and for life in general of the rational attitude. Philosophy itself is not a science and for that very reason its element is authentic truth.

Both reactions—submission to science and rejection of science conceived as cogent, methodical and universally valid knowledge—seem to spell the end of philosophy. Whether it is the slave of science or whether it denies all science, it has in either case ceased to be philosophy.

The seeming triumph of the sciences over philosophy has for some decades created a situation in which philosophers go back to various sources in search of true philosophy. If such a thing is found, the question of the relation between philosophy and science will be answered, both in a theoretical and in a concrete sense. It is a practical question of the utmost urgency.

We shall appreciate the full weight of this problem if we consider its historical origin. It developed from three complexly intertwined factors. These are: a. The spirit of modern science; b. The ancient and ever recurrent attempt to achieve universal philosophical knowledge; c. The philosophical concept of truth, as it was first and for all time elucidated in Plato.

Ad a. The modern sciences, developed only in the last few centuries, have brought into the world a new scientific attitude which existed neither in Asia, nor in antiquity, nor in the Middle Ages.

Even the Greeks, to be sure, conceived of science as methodical, cogently certain, and universally valid knowledge. But the modern sciences have not only brought out these basic attributes of science with greater purity (a task which has not yet been completed), they have also given new form and new foundation to the purpose, scope and unity of their fields of inquiry. I shall indicate certain of their fundamental characteristics:

(1) To modern science, *nothing is indifferent.* In its eyes, every fact, even the smallest and ugliest, the most distant and most alien, is a legitimate object of inquiry for the very reason that it exists. Science has become truly universal. There is nothing that can evade it. Nothing must be hidden or passed over in silence; nothing must remain a mystery.

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(2) Modern science is by definition unfinished, because it progresses toward the infinite, whereas ancient science in every one of its forms presented itself as finished; its actual development was in every case shortlived, and it never set its own development as its conscious goal. Modern scientists have understood that an all-embracing world-system, which deduces everything that exists from one or a few principles, is impossible. A world-system has other sources, and can only claim universal validity if scientific critique is relaxed and particulars are mistaken for absolutes. Such unprecedented systematizations as those achieved by modern physics cover only one aspect of reality. Through them reality as a whole has become more split up and deprived of foundations than it ever before seemed to the human mind. Hence the incompleteness of the modern world as compared to the Greek cosmos.

(3) The ancient sciences remained *scattered,* unrelated to one another. They did not aim at constituting an all-embracing body of specific knowledge, whereas the modern sciences strive to be integrated into a universal frame of reference. Though a true world-system is no longer possible for them, a cosmos of the sciences is still conceivable. Our sense of the inadequacy of each special branch of knowledge demands that each science be connected with knowledge as a whole.

(4) The modern sciences attach little value to the *possibilities* of thought; they recognize the idea only in definite and concrete knowledge, after it has proved its worth as an istrument of discovery and been subjected to infinite modifications in the process of investigation. True, there is a certain similarity between ancient and modern atomic theory, in so far as the general pattern is concerned. But the ancient theory was merely an intrinsically finished interpretation of possibilities, based on plausible explanations of available experience, while the modern theory, in constant association with experience, undergoes perpetual change by confirmation and disproof and is itself an implement of investigation.

(6) Today a scientific attitude has become possible: an attitude of inquiry toward all phenomena; today the scientist can know certain things clearly and definitely, he can distinguish between what he knows and what he does not know; and he has amassed an unprecedented abundance of knowledge (how very lit-

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tle the Greek physician or the Greek technician knew by comparison!). The moral imperative of modern science is to search for reliable knowledge on the basis of unprejudiced inquiry and critique, without any preconceived ideas. When we enter into its sphere, we have the sensation of breathing clean air, of leaving behind us all vague talk, all plausible opinions, all stubborn prejudice and blind faith.

Ad b. Modern science shares the age-old striving for total philosophical knowledge. Philosophy had from the first set itself up as the science that knows the whole,—not as infinitely progressing, factual knowledge, but as self-contained doctrine. Now modern philosophy since Descartes has identified itself with modern science, but in such a way that it still retained the philosophical concept of a total knowledge. It can be shown, however, that for this very reason Descartes did not understand modern science, the investigations of Galileo for example, and that his own work had in spirit little to do with modern science, although as a creative mathematician he helped to advance this science. The ensuing philosophers, even to a certain extent Kant, were still caught in this totalist conception of science. Hegel once again believed that he was achieving the construction of an authentic total science, and that he possessed all the sciences in his cosmos of the mind.

This identification of modern science and modern philosophy with their old aspiration to total knowledge was catastrophic for both of them. The modern sciences which, by a self-deception common to all of them, looked on those great philosophies of the seventeenth century and on some later philosophies as pillars of their own edifice, were tainted by their aspirations to absolute knowledge. Modern philosophy has done its greatest work only "in spite of" all this, or one might say, by a constant misunderstanding.

Ad c. Neither the modern concept of science nor science in the sense of a total philosophical system coincides with the strictly philosophical conception of science which Plato formulated in a way that has never been surpassed. How far removed is the truth, the knowledge of which Plato interprets in his parable of the cave and touches on in his dialectic, this truth that applies to being and to that which is above all being—how fundamentally different it is from the truth of the sciences, which move only amid the manifestations of

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being without ever attaining to being itself, and how different from the truth of the dogmatic system which holds itself to be in possession of the whole of being. What a distance between the truth which can nowhere be set down in writing but which, according to Plato's seventh epistle, though it can only be attained by thought, is kindled in a favorable moment of communication among men of understanding, and the truth which is written, universally cogent and intelligible, distinct and available to all thinking creatures!

Three so different conceptions of scientific knowledge—the first patterned on the method of modern science, the second derived from the idea of a total philosophical system, and the third related to faith in a truth which is directly apprehended by the intellect (Plato's truth being an example)—all contribute to the present confusion. An example:

Its inquiries and investigations in the economic field have made Marxism an important force in scientific development. But this it shares with many other trends and its scientific contribution does not account for its influence. Marxism also represents a philosophical thesis regarding the dialectical course of history as a total process which it purports to understand. Thus it constitutes a philosophical doctrine, but one with a claim to universal scientific validity. It has the same epistemological basis as Hegel's philosophy, whose dialectical method remains its implement. The difference is only that for Hegel the core of the historical process lies in what he calls the "idea," while for Marx it lies in the mode of production of man who, unlike the animals, obtains his sustenance through systematic labor. Both Hegel and Marx derive all phenomena from what they regard as the core. Marx therefore rightly claims to have stood Hegel on his head; that however is only in content, for he did not depart from Hegel's method of constructing reality by the dialectic of the concept.

Now this identification of economic knowledge, which is gained by scientific method, hence inductively, and which by its very nature is subject to constant modifications, with the dialectical knowledge of the total process, which passes for essentially definitive knowledge, is the source of the fallacy committed by Hegel and in a different form by the type of modern philosophy that began with Descartes and was repeated by Marx. Marx's absolute, exclusive claim therefore

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originates in a conception of philosophy as total, systematic knowledge; but at the same time, his doctrine is presented as a result of modern science, from which it does not at all follow.

In addition to the conceptions patterned on modern science and total philosophy, there operates in Marxism also a third conception, reflecting the lofty idea of an absolute truth that fulfills man's will and aspirations, analogous to the Platonic idea of truth, although entirely different in character. Marxism conceives of itself as the true consciousness of the classless man. This quasi-religious postulate is the source of a new kind of fanaticism which invokes not faith, but modern science, which charges its opponents with stupidity, malice, or inability to overcome class prejudice, and contrasts these with its own universal human truth that is free from class bondage and hence absolute.

Similar intellectual tendencies, which uncritically hypostatize a field of investigation that is meaningful within its limits into a total science, and infuses them with a religious attitude, have been manifested in the domains of racial theory, and psychoanalysis, and in many other fields.

The false confusion of heterogeneous elements produces here, on a large scale, results that are so familiar on a small scale in everyday life—an attitude of never being at a loss for an answer, satisfaction with mere plausibility, stubbornly uncritical statements and affirmations, inability to explore in a genuine sense, to listen, analyze, test, and reflect on principles.

The infuriating part of it is that science is invoked to defend something that runs directly counter to the scientific spirit. For science leads us to the understanding of the principles, limitations, and meaning of our knowledge. It teaches us to know, in full consciousness of the methods by which each stage of knowledge is achieved. It produces a certainty whose relativity, i.e. dependence on presuppositions and methods of investigation, is its crucial characteristic.

Thus we are today confronted with an ambivalent concept of science. Genuine science can, as has always been the case, appear to be occult; it is in the nature of a public secret. It is public because it is accessible to everyone; it is a secret because it is far from being truly understood by everyone. All the more brightly shines the gen-

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uine, unswerving, never-failing scientific attitude, whose very critical awareness of its limits leaves room for every other source of truth in man.

In addition there is a wonderful virtue in science itself. In the course of scientific development, only what is truly known is permanently preserved, the rest is eliminated through critique. So long as free discussion prevails, a body of knowledge forms that is more than the men who are its vehicle, a body of knowledge that no individual can encompass in all its scope.

At a time when confusion prevails regarding the meaning of science, three tasks are imperative, corresponding to the three tendencies discussed above.

First, the idea that total philosophical knowledge is scientific knowledge must be exposed as false. The sciences themselves critically explode this false total knowledge. It is here that the opposition to philosophy has its root, and in this respect contempt of it is justifiable.

Secondly, the sciences must be made pure. This can be accomplished through constant struggle and awareness in the course of our scientific activity itself. By and large, the need for basic clarity concerning science and its limits is readily admitted even by those who sin against such clarity in practice. But the essential is to achieve this purity within the specific sciences. This must be done largely through the critical work of the scientists themselves. But the philosopher who wishes to test the truth-meaning of scientific knowledge, to auscultate it, so to speak, must participate in the actual work of these scientists.

Thirdly, a pure philosophy must be worked out in the new conditions that have been created by the modern sciences. This is indispensable for the sake of the sciences themselves. For philosophy is always alive in the sciences, and so inseparable from them that the purity of both can be achieved only jointly. The rejection of philosophy usually leads to the unwitting development of a bad philosophy. The concrete work of the scientist is guided by his conscious or unconscious philosophy, and this philosophy cannot be the object of scientific method.

For example: it is impossible to prove scientifically that there should be such a thing as science. Or: The choice of an object of science that is made from among an infinite number of existing ob-

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jects on the basis of this object itself, is a choice that cannot be justified scientifically. Or: The ideas that guide us are tested in the systematic process of investigation, but they themselves do not become an object of direct investigation.

Science left to itself as mere science becomes homeless. The intellect is a whore, said Nicholas of Cusa, for it can prostitute itself to anything. Science is a whore, said Lenin, for it sells itself to any class interest. For Nicholas of Cusa it is Reason, and ultimately the knowledge of God, that gives meaning, certainty and truth to intellectual knowledge; for Lenin, it is the classless society that promotes pure science. Be that as it may, awareness of all this is the business of philosophical reflection. Philosophy is inherent in the actual sciences themselves; it is their inner meaning that provides the scientist with sustenance and guides his methodical work. He who consolidates this guidance through reflection and becomes conscious of it, has reached the stage of explicit philosophizing. If this guidance fails, science falls into gratuitous convention, meaningless correctness, aimless busyness and spineless servitude.

A pure science requires a pure philosophy.

But how can philosophy be pure? Has it not always striven to be science? Our answer is: It is "science," but science of such a sort that in the sense of modern scientific inquiry it is both less and more than science.

Philosophy can be called science in so far as it presupposes the sciences. There is no tenable philosophy outside the sciences. Although conscious of its distinct character, philosophy is inseparable from science. It refuses to transgress against universally binding insight. Anyone who philosophizes must be familiar with scientific method.

Any philosopher who is not trained in a scientific discipline and who fails to keep his scientific interests constantly alive, will inevitably bungle and stumble, and mistake uncritical rough drafts for definitive knowledge. Unless an idea is submitted to the coldly dispassionate test of scientific inquiry, it is rapidly consumed in the fire of emotions and passions, or else it withers into a dry and narrow fanaticism.

Moreover, anyone who philosophizes strives for scientific knowledge, for it is the only way to genuine non-knowledge. It is as though the most magnificent insights could be achieved only through

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man's quest for the limit at which cognition runs aground, not seemingly and temporarily, but genuinely and definitively, not with a sense of loss and despair, but with a sense of genuine internal evidence. Only definitive knowledge can make definitive non-knowledge possible; it alone can achieve the authentic failure which opens up a vista, not merely upon the discoverable existent, but upon being itself.

In accomplishing the great task of dispelling all magical conceptions, modern science enters upon the path that leads to the intuition of the true depth, the authentic mystery, which becomes present only through the most resolute knowledge in the consummation of non-knowledge.

Consequently philosophy turns against those who despise the sciences, against the sham prophets who deprecate scientific inquiry, who mistake the errors of science for science itself, and who would even hold science, "modern science," responsible for the evils and the inhumanity of our era.

Rejecting superstitious belief in science as well as contempt of science, philosophy grants its unconditional recognition to modern science. In its eyes science is a marvelous thing, which can be relied upon more than anything else, the most significant achievement of man in his history, an achievement that is the source of great dangers, but of even greater opportunities, and that from now on must be regarded as a prerequisite of all human dignity. Without science, the philosopher knows, his own pursuits eventuate in nothing.

These pursuits can continue to be called scientific, because philosophy proceeds methodically and because it is conscious of its methods. But these methods differ from those of science in that they have no object of inquiry. Any specific object is the object of a particular science. Were I to say that the object of philosophy is the whole, the world, being,—philosophical critique would answer that such terms do not denote genuine objects. The methods of philosophy are methods of transcending the object. To philosophize is to transcend. But since our thinking is inseparable from objects, the history of philosophy is an account of how the progress of human thought has succeeded in transcending the objects of philosophy. These objects, the great creations of philosophy, function as road-signs, indicating the direction of philosophical transcending. Thus there is no substitute for the profound discourse of the metaphysician,

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which speaks to us from the centuries; to assimilate it from its source in the history of philosophy is not only to know something that once was but to make it come to life.

The mass of sham philosophical knowledge taught in the schools originates in the hypostatization of entities that have served for a time as the signposts of philosophy, but are always being transcended by it. Such hypostatized entities are nothing but the *capita mortua*, the ossuaries of the great metaphysical systems. To imagine that they confer knowledge is a philosophical perversion. In philosophizing we must not fall under the spell of the object that we use as a means of transcendence. We must remain masters of our thoughts and not be subjugated by them.

Yet in this intellectual transcendence, which is proper to philosophy and which is analogous to scientific forms, philosophy is less than science. For it does not gain any tangible results, nor any intellectually binding insight. There is no overlooking the simple fact that while scientific cognition is identical throughout the world, philosophy, despite its claim to universality, is not actually universal in any shape or form. This fact is the outward characteristic of the peculiar nature of philosophical truth. Although scientific truth is universally valid, it remains relative to method and assumptions; philosophical truth is absolute for him who conquers it in historical actuality, but its statements are not universally valid. Scientific truth is one and the same for all,—philosophical truth wears multiple historical cloaks; each of these is the manifestation of a unique reality, each has its justification, but they are not identically transmissible.

The one philosophy is the *philosophia perennis* around which all philosophies revolve, which no one possesses, in which every genuine philosopher shares, and which nevertheless can never achieve the form of an intellectual edifice valid for all and exclusively true.

Thus philosophy is not only less, but also more than science, namely, as the source of a truth that is inaccessible to scientifically binding knowledge. It is this philosophy that is meant in such definitions as: To philosophize is to learn how to die, or to rise to godhead—or to know being *qua* being. The meaning of such definitions is: philosophical thought is inward action; it appeals to freedom; it is a summons to transcendence. Or the same thing can be formulated differently: Philosophy is the act of becoming conscious of genuine

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being—or is the thinking of a faith in man that must be infinitely elucidated—or is the way of man's self-assertion through thinking.

But none of these propositions is properly speaking a definition. There is no definition of philosophy, because philosophy cannot be determined by something outside it. There is no genus above philosophy, under which it can be subsumed as a species. Philosophy defines itself, relates itself directly to godhead, and does not justify itself by any kind of utility. It grows out of the primal source in which man is given to himself.

To sum up: The sciences do not encompass all of the truth, but only the exact knowledge that is binding to the intellect and universally valid. Truth has a greater scope and part of it can reveal itself only to philosophical reason. Throughout the centuries since the early Middle Ages, philosophical works have been written under the title "On the Truth"; today the same task still remains urgent, i. e., to gain insight into the essence of truth in its full scope, under the present conditions of scientific knowledge and historical experience.

The foregoing considerations also apply to the relation between science and philosophy. Only if the two are strictly distinguished can the inseparable connection between them remain pure and truthful.

Through research and study, the university strives to achieve the great practical unity of the sciences and philosophy. At the university a philosophical view of the world has always been made manifest through scientific method.

The university is the meeting place of all sciences. In so far as these remain an aggregate, the university resembles an intellectual warehouse; but in so far as they strive toward unity of knowledge, it resembles a never-finished temple.

A century and a half ago, this was still self-evident: the philosophical ideas that were assumed by the scientists in the various disciplines were brought to the highest light of consciousness by the philosophers. But the situation has changed. The sciences have become fragmented by specialization. It has come to be believed that scientific cognition, marked by the neatness of universally valid particular knowledge, could break away from philosophy.

Is the present dispersion of the sciences the ultimate and nec-

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essary stage? One might wish for a philosophy that would encompass and assimilate the whole tradition, that would be equal to the intellectual situation of our time, that would express the contents common to all of us, and this both in sublime intellectual constructions and in simple propositions capable of finding resonance in every man. Today we have no such philosophy.

Old university seals dating from the fifteenth century reveal figures wrought in gold, which represent Christ distributing their tasks to the faculties. Even where such seals are still in use they no longer express the modern reality; yet they still bear witness to the task of unifying the whole.

Today neither theology nor philosophy create a whole. Does the university still have a common spirit? As regards its organization, it still seems to constitute an ever-changing plan without symmetry or logic, never definitive, constantly in process of enlargement, a plan in which everything that achieves scientific status has its place. The most disparate elements meet. Not related by a knowledge of the whole, everyone is nevertheless compelled to see in this meeting something previously unknown, everyone learns to come into contact with highly unfamiliar things. Hence arises the intellectual life, the striving for greater expanse and freedom of thought. Thus a common spirit is no longer found in a faith binding to all, but only in critical inquiry as such, in the recognition of the logically or empirically unascertainable, in the resolute refusal to perpetrate the *sacrificium intellectus,* in open-mindedness, in unlimited questioning, in integrity.

This spirit is the product of the last few centuries. Will the university content itself with this spirit forever? For philosophy, this situation seems to offer extraordinary possibilities. But it would be absurd to draw up a program for a task that can be carried out only by an intellectual world operating with a true sense of community, not by an individual.

So long as the philosopher retains his integrity, he is modestly aware of the limits of his knowledge. This must not be confused with another kind of modesty needed today, that of the *teacher* of philosophy. The best philosophers today are not perhaps to be found among those charged explicitly with the teaching of philosophy. For the philosophy *in* the sciences, which preserves us from dissipating

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our energies on things that are not worth knowing, and which animates scientific inquiry, is the concrete philosophy that is embodied in the totality of a specific science. This philosophy thus becomes in a sense the spokesman for knowledge in general, provided that constant care is taken to see this particular domain in relation to all the knowable, and thereby to anchor it in depth.

The teacher of philosophy in the service of such efforts is not a leader who lays down the law, but an attentive and patient listener, eager to find meaning in the broadest interrelations.

The teacher of philosophy reveres the individual great philosophers, who are not specimens of a type, but creators (such do not exist today), but he rejects the idolization of men, which began even in the academy of Plato, for even the greatest are men, and err, and no one is an authority who must be obeyed by right.

And the teacher of philosophy has respect for each science whose insights are binding—but he condemns the scientific pride which imagines that everything can be known in its ultimate foundation, or even goes so far as to suppose that is is known.

His ideal is that of a rational being coexisting with other rational beings. He wants to doubt, he thirsts for objections and attacks, he strives to become capable of playing his part in the dialogue of ever-deepening communication, which is the prerequisite of all truth, and without which there is no truth.

His hope is that in the same measure as he becomes a rational being, he may acquire the profound contents which can sustain man, that his will, in so far as his striving is honest, may become good through the direct help of the transcendent, without any human mediation.

As a teacher of philosophy, however, he feels that it is his duty not to let his students forget the great minds of the past, to preserve the various philosophical methods as an object of instruction, and to see to it that the sciences influence philosophical thinking; to elucidate the present age and at the same time to join his students in conquering a view of the eternal.

(*Translated from the German by Ralph Manheim*)

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Vladimir Nabokov

FIRST POEM

In order to reconstruct the summer of 1914, when the numb fury of verse-making first came over me, all I really need is to visualize a certain pavilion. There the lank, fifteen-year-old lad I then was, sought shelter during a thunderstorm, of which there was an inordinate number that July. I dream of my pavilion at least twice a year, and some symbol, that of a frustrated landjunkerish complex or the like, might be extracted from it, I dare say, by whoever believes in the dreary inanities of psychoanalytic interpretation.

As a rule, it appears in my dreams quite independently of their subject matter, which, of course, may be anything, from abduction to zoölatry. It hangs around, so to speak, with the unobtrusiveness of an artist's signature. I find it clinging to a corner of the dream canvas or cunningly worked into some ornamental part of the picture. At times, however, it seems to be suspended in the middle distance—a trifle baroque, and yet in tune with the handsome trees whose sap once ran through its timber. Wine-red and bottle-green and dark-blue lozenges of stained glass lend a chapel-like touch to the lattice work of its casements. It is just as it was in my boyhood, a sturdy old wooden structure above a ferny ravine in a private park some fifty miles south of St. Petersburg. Just as it was, or perhaps a little more perfect. In the real thing some of the glass was missing, crumpled leaves had been swept in by the wind. At my feet, a dead horsefly lay on its back near the brown remains of a birch ament. And the patches of disintegrating whitewash on the inside of the door had been used by various trespassers for such jottings as: "Dasha, Tamara and Lena have been here" or "Down with Austria!"

The storm passed quickly. The rain which had been a mass of violently descending water wherein the trees writhed and rolled, was reduced all of a sudden to slanting lines of silent gold against a back-

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ground of subsiding vegetable agitation. Gulfs of voluptuous blue were expanding between great clouds—heap upon heap of pure white and purplish gray, *lepota* (Old Russian for "stately beauty"), moving myths, gouache and guano, among the outlines of which one could distinguish a mammary allusion or the death mask of a poet.

The tennis court was a region of great lakes.

Beyond the park, above steaming fields, a rainbow slipped into view; the fields ended in the jagged border of a remote fir wood; part of the rainbow went across it, and that section of the forest edge shimmered most magically through the pale-green and pink of the iridescent veil drawn before it; a tenderness and a glory that made poor relatives of the rhomboidal colored reflections which the return of the sun had brought forth on the pavilion floor.

A moment later my first poem began. What touched it off? I think I know. Without any wind blowing, the sheer weight of a raindrop, shining in parasitic luxury on a cordate leaf, caused its tip to dip, and what looked like a globule of quicksilver performed a sudden glissando down the center vein, and then, having shed its bright load, the relieved leaf unbent. Tip, leaf, dip, relief—the instant it all took to happen seemed to me not so much a fraction of time as a fissure in it, a missed heartbeat, which was refunded at once by a patter of rimes: I say "patter" intentionally, for when a gust of wind did come, the trees would briskly start to drip all together in as crude an imitation of the recent downpour as the stanza I was already muttering resembled the spasm of wonder I had experienced when for a moment heart and leaf had been one.

In the avid heat of the early afternoon, benches, bridges and boles (everything in fact save the tennis court) were drying with incredible rapidity, and soon little remained of my initial inspiration. Although the bright fissure had closed, I doggedly went on composing. My medium happened to be Russian but could have been just as well Basic English or Volapük. The kind of poem I produced in those days was hardly anything more than a sign I made of being alive, of passing or having passed, or hoping to pass, through certain intense human emotions. It was a phenomenon of orientation, rather than of art, thus comparable to stripes of paint on a roadside rock or to a pillared heap of stones marking a mountain trail.

But then, in a sense, all poetry is positional: to try to express

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one's position in regard to the universe embraced by consciousness, is an immemorial urge. The arms of consciousness reach out and grope, and the longer they are the better. Tentacles, not wings, are Apollo's natural members. A philosophical friend of mine in later years used to say that while the scientist sees everything that happens in one point of space, the poet feels everything that happens in one point of time. Lost in thought, he taps his knee with his wand-like pencil, and at the same instant a car (New York license plate) passes along the road, a child bangs the screen door of a neighboring porch, an old man yawns in a misty Turkestan orchard, a granule of cinder-grey sand is rolled by the wind on Venus, a Docteur Jacques Hirsch in Grenoble puts on his reading glasses, and trillions of other such trifles occur—all forming an instantaneous and transparent organism of events, of which the poet is the nucleus.

That summer I was still far too young to evolve any wealth of "cosmic synchronization" (to quote my philosopher again). But I did discover at least that a person hoping to become a poet must have the capacity of thinking of several things at the same time. In the course of the languid rambles that accompanied the making of my first poem, I ran into the village schoolmaster, an ardent socialist, a good man, intensely devoted to my father (who had had the school rebuilt on modern lines), always with a tight posy of wild flowers, always smiling, always perspiring. While politely discussing with him my father's sudden journey to town, I registered simultaneously and with equal clarity not only his wilting flowers, his flowing tie and the blackheads on the fleshy volutes of his nostrils, but also the dull little voice of a cuckoo coming from afar and the remembered impression of the pictures (enlarged agricultural pests and bearded Russian writers) in the well aërated classrooms of the village school which I had once or twice visited; and—to continue a tabulation which hardly does justice to the ethereal simplicity of the whole process—the flash of some utterly irrelevant recollection (a pedometer I had lost) was released from a neighboring brain cell, and the savor of the grass stalk I was chewing mingled with the cuckoo's note, and all the while I was richly, serenely aware of my own manifold awareness.

He beamed and he bowed (in the effusive manner of a Russian radical) and took a couple of steps backward, and turned, and

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jauntily went on his way, and I picked up the thread of my poem. During the short time I had been otherwise engaged, something seemed to have happened to such words as I had already strung together: they did not look quite as lustrous as they had before the interruption. Some suspicion crossed my mind that I might be dealing in dummies. Fortunately, this cold twinkle of critical perception did not last. The fervor I had been trying to render took over again and brought its medium back to an illusory life. The ranks of words I reviewed were again so glowing, with their puffed out little chests and trim uniforms that I put down to mere fancy the sagging that I had noticed out of the corner of my eye.

Apart from credulous inexperience, a young Russian lyricist had to cope with a special handicap. In contrast to the rich vocabulary of satirical or narrative verse, the Russian elegy suffered from a bad case of verbal anemia. Only in very expert hands and with the very subtle aid of association and melody could it be made to transcend its humble origin—the pallid poetry of eighteenth-century France. True, in my day a new school of versification was in the act of ripping up the old rhythms, but it was still to the latter that the conservative beginner turned in search of a neutral instrument—possibly because he did not wish to be diverted from the simple expression of simple emotions by adventures in hazardous form. Form, however, got its revenge. The rather uniform designs into which early nineteenth-century Russian poets had twisted the pliant elegy resulted in certain recurrent couplings of words, or types of words (such as the Russian equivalents of *"fol amour"* or *"langoureux et rêvant"*) which later lyricists could not shake off for a whole century.

In an especially obsessive arrangement, peculiar to the iambic of four to six feet, a long, wriggly adjective would occupy the first four or five syllables of the last three feet of the line. A good tetrametric example would be *"ter-pi bes-chis-len-ny-e mu-ki"* (en-dure in-cal-cu-la-ble tor-ments). The young Russian poet was liable to slide with fatal ease into this alluring abyss of syllables, for the illustration of which I have chosen *beschislennye* only because it translates well; the real favorites were such typical elegiac components as *"tainstvennye"* (mysterious), *"zadumchivye"* (pensive), *"utrachennye"* (lost), and so forth. Despite its great length, a word of that kind had but a single stress of its own, and consequently the penultimate

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metrical accent of the line encountered a normally unstressed syllable ("*ny*" in the Russian example, "la" in the English one). This produced a delicious acceleration, which, however, was much too familiar an effect to redeem banality of meaning.

That I chose for my first attempts at composition such ancient molds, seems to me nowadays monstrous. It was as if a budding musician were given a viola d'amore or a harpsichord to use for his first lesson. Indeed, I find it difficult to accept as authentic the recollection of my versifying at a time when I had really no inkling of what it was all about. For I did not know that beyond the archipelago there was the continent; that beyond mere verse, rime-bangled or blank, fettered or free, falsely clear or falsely recondite (concealing triteness beneath ashen obscurities—the waste product of some recognized religion) there existed a Russian prose which borrowed its romantic sweep from science and its terse precision from poetry.

A naive beginner, I fell into all the traps laid by the singing epithet. Not that I did not struggle. In fact, I was working at my elegy very hard, taking endless trouble over every line, choosing and rejecting, roiling the words on my tongue with the glazed-eyed solemnity of a tea taster, and still it would come, that atrocious betrayal. The frame impelled the picture, the husk shaped the pulp. The hackneyed order of words (short verb or pronoun—long adjective—short noun) engendered the hackneyed disorder of thought, and some such line as "*mo-i mu-chi-tel-ny-e grio-zy*" (my anguished daydreams) led in its turn to something ending in "*rozy*" (roses) or "*beriozy*" (birchtrees) or "*grozy*" (thunderstorms), so that certain emotions were connected with certain surroundings not by a free act of one's will but by the faded ribbon of tradition. Nonetheless the nearer my poem got to its completion, the more certain I became that whatever I saw before me would be seen by others. As I focussed my eyes upon a kidney-shaped flowerbed (and noted one pink petal lying on the loam and a small ant investigating its decayed edge) or considered the tanned midriff of a birch trunk where some hoodlum had stripped it of its papery, pepper-and-salt bark, I really believed that all this would be perceived by the reader through the magic veil of my words such as "*utrachennye rozy*" or "*zadumchivoi beriozy*." It did not occur to me then that far from being a veil, those poor words were so opaque that, in fact, they formed a wall to

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which all one could distinguish were the well-worn bits of the major and minor poets I imitated. Years later, in the squalid suburb of a foreign town, I remember seeing a fence, the boards of which had been brought from some other place where they had been used, apparently, as the enclosure of an itinerant circus. Animals had been painted on it by a versatile barker, but whoever had removed the boards and then knocked them together again, must have been blind or insane, for now the fence showed only disjointed parts of animals (some of them, moreover, upside down)—a tawny haunch, a zebra's head, the leg of an elephant.

In the physical plan, my intense labors were marked by a number of dim actions or postures, such as walking, sitting, lying. Each of these broke again into fragments of no spatial importance: at the walking stage, for instance, I might be wandering one moment in the depths of the park and the next pacing the rooms of the house. Or, to take the sitting stage, I would suddenly become aware that a plate of something I could not even remember having sampled was being removed and that my mother, her left cheek twitching as it did whenever she worried, was narrowly observing from her place at the top of the long table my moodiness and lack of appetite. I would lift my head to explain—but the table had gone, and I was sitting alone on a roadside stump, the stick of my butterfly net, in metronomic motion, drawing arc after arc on the brownish sand: earthen rainbows with variations in depth of stroke rendering the different colors.

When I was irrevocably committed to finish my poem or die, there came the most trance-like state of all. With hardly a twinge of surprise, I found myself, of all places, on a leathern couch in the cold, musty, little-used room that had been my grandfather's study. On that couch I lay prone, in a kind of reptilian freeze, one arm dangling, so that my knuckles touched the floral figures of the carpet. When next I came out of that trance, the greenish flora was still there, my arm was still dangling, but now I was prostrate on the edge of a rickety wharf, and the water-lilies I touched were real, and the undulating plump shadows of alder-foliage on the water—apotheosized inkblots, oversized amoebas—were rhythmically palpitating, extending and drawing in dark pseudopods, which, when contracted, would break at their rounded margins into elusive and fluid

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macules, and these would come together again to re-shape the groping terminals. I relapsed into my private mist, and when I emerged again, the support of my extended body had become a low bench in the park, and the live shadows, among which my hand dipped, now moved on the ground, where they showed delicate violet tints instead of aqueous black and green. So little did ordinary measures of existence mean in that state that I would not have been surprised to come out of its tunnel right into the park of Versailles, or the Tiergarten, or Sequoia National Forest; and, inversely, when the old trance occurs nowadays, I am quite prepared to find myself, when I awaken from it, high up in a certain tree, above the dappled bench of my boyhood, my belly pressed against a thick, comfortable branch and one arm hanging down among the leaves upon which the shadows of other leaves ripple.

Various sounds reached me in my various situations. It might be the dinner gong or something less usual, such as the foul music of a barrelorgan. Somewhere near the stables the old tramp would grind, and on the strength of more direct impressions imbibed in earlier years, I would see him mentally from my perch. Painted on the front of his instrument were Balkan peasants of sorts dancing among palmoid willows. Every now and then he shifted the crank from one hand to the other. I saw the jersey and skirt of his little bald female monkey, her collar, the raw sore on her neck, the chain which she kept plucking at every time the man pulled it, hurting her badly, and the several servants standing around, gaping, grinning, simple folks terribly tickled by a monkey's "antics." Only the other day, in the place where I am recording these matters, I came across a farmer and his son (the kind of keen, healthy kid you see in breakfast food ads), who were similarly diverted by the sight of a young cat torturing a baby chipmunk—letting him run a few inches and then pouncing upon him again. Most of his tail was gone, the stump was bleeding. As he could not escape by running, the game little fellow tried one last measure: he stopped and lay down on his side in order to merge with a bit of light and shade on the ground, but the too violent heaving of his flank gave him away.

The family phonograph, which the advent of the evening set in action, was another musical machine I could hear through my verse. On the verandah, where our relatives and friends assembled,

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it emitted from its brass mouth were the so-called *tziganskie romancy* beloved of my generation. These were more or less anonymous imitations of gypsy songs—or imitations of such imitations. What constituted their gypsiness was a deep monotonous moan broken by a kind of hiccup, the audible cracking of a lovesick heart. At their best, they were responsible for the raucous note vibrating here and there in the works of true poets (I am thinking especially of Alexander Blok). At their worst, they could be likened to the *apache* stuff composed by mild men of letters and delivered by thick-set ladies in Parisian night clubs. What may be termed their ecological niche consisted of nightingales in tears, lilacs in bloom and the alleys of whispering trees that graced the parks of the landed gentry. Those nightingales trilled, and in a pine grove the setting sun banded the trunks at different levels with fiery red. A tambourine, still throbbing, seemed to lie on the darkening moss. For a spell, the last notes of the singer's contralto pursued me through the dusk. When silence returned, my first poem was ready.

It was indeed a miserable concoction, containing many borrowings besides its pseudo-Pushkinian modulations. An echo of Tutchev's thunder and a refracted sunbeam from Fet were alone excusable. For the rest I vaguely remember the mention of "memory's sting"—*"vospominan'ia zhalo"* (which I had really visualized as the ovipositor of an ichneumon fly straddling a cabbage caterpillar, but had not dared say so) and something about the old-world charm of a distant barrel-organ. Worst of all were the shameful gleanings from Apukhtin's and Grand Duke Constantine's lyrics of the *tziganski* type. They used to be persistently pressed upon me by a youngish and rather attractive aunt, who could also spout Louis Bouilhet's famous piece (*A une Femme*) in which a metaphorical violin bow is incongruously used to play on a metaphorical guitar, and lots of stuff by Ella Wheeler Wilcox—a tremendous hit with the Empress and her ladies-in-waiting. It seems hardly worth while to add that, as themes go, my elegy dealt with the loss of a beloved mistress—Delia, Tamara or Lenore—whom I had never lost, never loved, never met but was all set to meet, love, lose.

In my foolish innocence I believed that what I had written was a beautiful and wonderful thing. As I carried it homewards, still unwritten, but so complete that even its punctuation marks were

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impressed on my brain like some pillow crease on a sleeper's flesh, I did not doubt that my mother would greet my achievement with glad tears of pride. The possibility of her being much too engrossed, that particular night, in other events to listen to verse did not enter my mind at all. Never in my life had I craved more for her praise. Never had I been more vulnerable. My nerves were on edge because of the darkness of the earth which I had not noticed ruffling itself up, and the nakedness of the firmament, the disrobing of which I had not noticed either. Overhead, between the formless trees bordering my dissolving path, the night sky was pale with stars. In those years, that marvelous mess of constellations, nebulae and interstellar gaps provoked in me an indescribable sense of nausea, of utter panic, as if I were hanging from earth upside down on the brink of infinite space, with terrestrial gravity still holding me by the heels but about to release me any moment.

Except for two corner windows on the upper storey (my mother's sitting room), the house was already dark. The night watchman let me in, and slowly, carefully, so as not to disturb the arrangement of words in my aching head, I mounted the stairs. My mother reclined on the sofa with the *Rech* (the St. Petersburg daily my father published) and an unopened *London Times* in her lap. A white telephone glimmered on the glass-topped table near her. Late as it was, she still kept expecting my father to call from St. Petersburg where he was being detained by the tension of approaching war. An armchair stood by the sofa but I avoided it because of its glossy golden satin, the mere sight of which caused a laciniate shiver to branch from my spine like nocturnal lightning. With a little cough, I sat down on a footstool and started my recitation. While thus engaged, I kept staring at the farther wall, upon which I see so clearly in retrospection some small daguerreotypes and silhouettes in oval frames, a Somov aquarelle (young birchtrees, the half of a rainbow—everything very melting and moist), a splendid Versailles autumn by Alexander Benois and a crayon drawing my mother's mother had made in her girlhood—that park pavilion again with its pretty windows partly screened by linked branches.

As my memory hesitated for a moment on the threshold of the last stanza, where so many opening words had been tried that the finally selected one was now somewhat camouflaged by an array of

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false entrances, I heard my mother sniff. Presently I finished reciting and looked up at her. She was smiling ecstatically through the tears that streamed down her face. "How wonderful, how beautiful," she said, and with the tenderness in her smile still growing she passed me a hand mirror so that I might see the smear of blood on my cheek-bone where at some indeterminable time I had crushed a gorged mosquito by the unconscious act of propping my cheek on my fist. But I saw more than that. Looking into my own eyes, I had the shocking sensation of finding the mere dregs of my usual self, odds and ends of an evaporated identity which it took my reason quite an effort to gather again in the glass.

Elisabeth Bishop

O BREATH

Beneath that loved and celebrated breast,
silent, bored, really, blindly-veined,
grieves, maybe, lives and lets
live, passes, bets,
something moving, but invisibly,
and with what clamor why restrained
I cannot fathom even a ripple.
(See the thin flying of nine black hairs
four around one five the other nipple,
flying almost intolerably on your own breath.)
Equivocal, but what we have in common's bound to be there,
whatever we must have equivalents for,
something that maybe I could bargain with
and make a separate peace beneath
within if never with.

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Marius Bewley

THE POETRY OF WALLACE STEVENS

A good deal of criticism has been written by this time on the poetry of Wallace Stevens; and it is poetry that requires extensive analysis in the beginning if it is finally to be read with much intelligence. But that criticism has not been consistently accurate or helpful, and some of the best of it—an essay by the late Hi Simons in *Sewanee Review,* for example—is now forgotten in the files of literary periodicals. R. P. Blackmur's essay in *The Double Agent* is still illuminating, and, fortunately, still available; but the only other easily accessible extended essay is Yvor Winters' acrid attack, "Wallace Stevens, or the Hedonist's Progress," which is extremely misleading in its conclusions. And even these articles (Blackmur's and Winters') were written early, and deal almost exclusively with *Harmonium.* The result of this critical situation is that there has been a persistent bias in favor of Stevens' first volume, and this has led to an underestimation of the importance of meaning in his work as a whole. Yet Stevens deserves his reputation partly because his meaning is an important one, and because that meaning has been consistently developing from *Harmonium* towards the maturity of the late work. I do not wish to imply that the central meaning in Stevens' poetry is not present in *Harmonium* just as much as in *Transport to Summer,* but it is present in a hidden way, and also in a less mature way, and it is sometimes extremely difficult to come by. Marianne Moore once wrote: "Wallace Stevens: the interacting veins of life between his early and late poems are an ever-continuing marvel to me." It is only by tracing out some of these veins of interaction that one can ever be *quite* sure, at least in the early poems, that one knows in fulness of detail what Stevens is talking about.

The relation, then, of Stevens' late work to his early work is not one of conflict or supersession. But neither would it be correct

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to say that the late work relates to the early as the sum of a problem relates to the digits it totals, for something has been added in the late work that was not present, in however piecemeal a state, before. What this addition is may be only a complex balance, an infusion of remarkable poise, but it *is* new. And despite those critics who think *Harmonium* the best of the volumes, it was needed. Its presence may have contributed to that sense of change in Stevens' work that led some critics in the late 'thirties to think he had taken up the social burden; but actually what was being taken up were the familiar meanings of the early verse, but taken up in a new way by the imagination—taken up, in fact, into what was sometimes a new dimension of poetic reality (new, at any rate for Stevens), and occasionally one could turn aside and look downward from the new use to the old use of an identical image, and realize with a sense of delicious discovery that one now, perhaps, really read the earlier poem for the first time. Stevens' poetry shares this ability to be read profitably both forward and backward with Eliot's poetry. When the "Preludes" were first printed in *Blast* in 1915 they must have seemed little more than remarkable Imagist poems, yet Eliot had showed almost uncanny prevision in naming them, and returning now from the *Quartets* to those early opening themes, their images acquire, through the resonance of all the later work, a depth and meaning that was surely not present to their earliest readers.

In a somewhat similar manner Wallace Stevens can write in "Six Significant Landscapes" (*Harmonium*) what appears, what undoubtedly is, a charming little Imagist piece hardly beyond Amy Lowell's prowess:

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
Think, in square rooms,
Looking at the floor,
Looking at the ceiling.
They confine themselves
To right-angled triangles.
If they tried rhomboids,
Cones, waving lines, ellipses—
As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon—
Rationalists would wear sombreros.

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This contains the possibilities of a complex idea, no doubt; but in itself there is little to invite the exploration of those possibilities. Yet nearly twenty years later in another poem called "The Pastor Caballero" (*Transport to Summer*), Stevens took up the same idea, and the poem became a reflection of his deepest attitudes:

The importance of a hat to its form becomes
More definite. The sweeping brim of the hat
Makes of the form Most Merciful Capitan

If the observer says so: grandiloquent
Locution of a hand in rhapsody.
Its line moves quickly with the genius

Of its improvisation until, at length
It enfolds the head in a vital ambiance,
A vital linear ambiance. The flare

In the sweeping brim becomes the origin
Of a human evocation, so disclosed
That, nameless, it creates an affectionate name,

Derived from adjectives of deepest mine.
The actual form bears outwardly this grace,
An image of the mind, an inward mate,

Tall and unfretted, a figure meant to bear
Its poisoned laurels in this poisoned wood,
High in the height that is our total height.

The formidable helmet is nothing now.
These two go well together, the sinuous brim
And the green flauntings of the hours of peace.

The bouncy observation of the first poem has gradually moved towards this subtle statement of spiritual poise, and that Stevens is consciously aware of the transition is strongly suggested by the "becomes" of the first line. The form of a deeply complex attitude or grace is metamorphosed into the form of a particular hat, and the images that cluster around this central symbol do a good deal towards elucidating other poems in *Harmonium*. But first take the hat itself:

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by this time we have a somewhat elaborate idea of what it stands for, and can turn back to the last verse of "Palace of Babies" (*Harmonium*):

> *The walker in the moonlight walked alone,*
> *And in his heart his disbelief lay cold.*
> *His broad-brimmed hat came close upon his eyes.*

This was certainly never one of the more difficult poems, but it had seemed a little thin. Years later Stevens enunciated a luxuriant connotation for the walker's broad-brimmed hat (a hat that obviously had no flare) and so he enabled his earlier image to explore in a more significant way the nature of the moonlight walker's disbelief. The day "The Pastor Caballero" was written the "Palace of Babies" became a better poem than it had been the day before: one might even say that it had been revised. This is not as odd as it may sound, for if a poet creates his own language he does not cease to create it until he has ceased to be a poet—and there is a sense in which a poet rewrites his collected works every time he writes a genuinely new poem.

But "The Pastor Caballero" offers relevant insights into other early poems as well. If one reads it together with Stevens' well-known "Bantams in Pine-Woods," for example, one senses how closely united Azcan is to the more faintly evoked Most Merciful Capitan:

> *Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in caftan*
> *Of tan with henna hackles, halt!*
>
> *Damned universal cock, as if the sun*
> *Was blackamoor to bear your blazing tail.*
>
> *Fat! Fat! Fat! Fat! I am the personal.*
> *Your world is you. I am my world.*
>
> *You ten-foot poet among inchlings. Fat!*
> *Begone! An inchling bristles in these pines,*
>
> *Bristles, and points their Appalachian tangs,*
> *And fears not portly Azcan nor his hoos.*

The rather brassy appeal of this poem exists at a more superficial

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level than its meaning, which is extremely difficult to excerpt. The poem has been relatively overpraised within the body of Stevens' work, and it would hardly be worth the trouble of interpreting, except that it provides one of the most admirable opportunities in Stevens for studying the interaction of imagery between his early and late poems. Two extreme interpretations which would contradict each other seem possible, depending on whom one chooses as the villain of the piece, Azcan or the inchling. An interpretation internally consistent, and more or less in harmony with the context provided by Stevens' poetry as a whole, can be worked out in either direction. And if Azcan seems a preferable hero to me, I am not forgetting that Mr. William Van O'Connor in a recent article on Stevens offered evidence in favor of the inchling. In actual fact, I believe that the real meaning is complex enough to release them both from the glory or responsibility of being either wholly hero or wholly villain. The poem seems to be, more than anything else, an investigation of the relationship between the imagination and reality in an anti-imaginative society. Read in this light it offers a comment on one of the more complex facets of Stevens' belief.

To begin: there is some evidence that Azcan is a symbol of the imagination. His height alone associates him with the "tall and unfretted" Capitan of the other poem, who was "high in the height that is our total height," and it associates him also with that "giant, on the horizon, glistening," who is used as the symbol for imagination in Stevens' recent poem, *A Primitive like an Orb*.* But there are important differences. The Most Merciful Capitan is so successfully a state of mind that he can be visualized only as the elegant sweeping flare in the brim of a quite irresistible hat—the sort of sombrero that rationalists would wear if they studied the ellipse of the half-moon. But what is most noticeable is that the relationship of Azcan and the Capitan to their respective environments is dissimilar. Azcan is not on friendly terms with the inchling, who represents his environment, and therefore reality; but the Capitan has evidently culminated a successful resistance ("The formidable helmet is nothing now") which leaves him free to look forward to "the green flauntings of the hours of peace."

* A Prospero Pamphlet, printed by the Banyan Press, March, 1948.

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If at this point one opens Stevens' Princeton lecture, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," printed in Allen Tate's *The Language of Poetry,* the following passage proves helpful in distinguishing between the plights of Azcan and the Capitan. Stevens says there that the possible poet of today "will consider that although he has himself witnessed, during the long period of his life, a general transition to reality, his own measure as a poet, in spite of all the passions of all the lovers of the truth, is the measure of his power to abstract himself, and to withdraw with him, into his abstraction, the reality on which the lovers of the truth insist. He must be able to abstract himself, and also to abstract reality, which he does by placing it in his imagination. He knows perfectly that he cannot be too noble a rider, that he cannot rise up loftily in helmet and armor on a horse of imposing bronze." Now the Capitan is a successful exponent of the imagination because he is able to dispense with the "formidable helmet." He knows how to deal with reality, how to subjugate it to himself by his abstracting genius. Azcan, on the other hand, is imagination mounted on too high a horse; his henna hackles are too impressive an armor, and he is out of touch with reality. "There are degrees of imagination," Stevens had said in the same lecture, "as, for example, degrees of vitality, and therefore of intensity. It is an implication that there are degrees of reality." And he further remarked that poetry represents an "interdependence of the imagination and reality as equals." But the hostile, military bearing of the inchling towards Azcan signifies that reality, in the world of this poem, is militantly out of sympathy with the imagination, and each is thereby revealed as incomplete in itself because of that hostility.

Stevens wrote in *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* (reprinted in *Transport to Summer*):

> *How clean the sun when seen in its idea,*
> *Washed in the remotest cleanliness of a heaven*
> *That has expelled us and our images.*

Because of the distorted dealings between them, Azcan cannot abstract from reality towards that pure idea of the sun: the sun is only a blackamoor to him, smeared over with the grimy limitations of physical fact. And yet, although prevented from functioning properly, Azcan remains a good giant at heart. When the inchling screams "Fat!" at

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Azcan, he applies the word in a derisive manner; but "fat" is an adjective with consistently benign connotations in Stevens' poetry. He uses it typically in *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* (Part III, poem 10) to describe the symbolical female embodiment of "the fiction that results from feeling," and that, as every reader of Stevens knows, is his chief reality (reality, that is, in its final, completed sense)—the synthesizing imagination itself.

It is characteristic of the elaborate conflicting connotations in this poem (representing the inchling's confusions) that the favorable word "fat" is qualified in the last line by the unfavorable adjective "portly." In *Harmonium* the page adjoining "Bantams in Pine-Woods" is occupied by "Anecdote of the Jar," in which a jar is placed on the top of a wilderness-encircled hill in Tennessee:

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild,
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It has been pointed out before that the good, untrammelled wilderness is subdued by the presence of that jar to a conventional and man-made drabness ("It took dominion everywhere"), and like Azcan the jar was of a port in air. It had style (more properly, manner or affectation) rather than reality. When the inchling uses "fat" and "portly" interchangeably he serves notice that he is unable to make the necessary distinctions (connoisseur of the hard-surfaced fact that he is).

And he reveals his incapacity even more remarkably by conjoining "portly" and the Chieftain's hoos. One would hardly guess it from the poem itself, but these hoos are a symbol of Azcan's innate vitality. In *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction* we find these verses:

We say: At night an Arabian in my room
With his damned hoobla-hoobla-hoobla-how
Inscribes a primitive astronomy

Across the unscrawled fores the future casts
And throws his stars around the floor. By day
The wood-dove used to chant his hoobla-hoo

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And still the grossest irridescence of ocean
Howls hoo and rises and howls hoo and falls.
Life's nonsense pierces us with strange relation.

Stevens always uses "primitive" to indicate the natural sources of vitality and insight which are suppressed by the academic and the insistently rational; and the stars and ocean (it is interesting to note that the ocean's "irridescence" is "gross," a synonym for "fat") are merely two items from his usual landscape that serve the same function. The Arabian, then, is seen, like Azcan and the Capitan, to be the symbol of imaginative knowledge; but it is necessary to remember that these three are not identical for they exist under different circumstances. (Incidentally, it is rather amusing to note the diverse implications carried by Stevens' Arabian astrologist and Eliot's Madame Sosostris, whose name, oddly enough—to say nothing of dear Mrs. Equitone—might have been invented by Stevens.) It was not difficult to pass Azcan's hoos off as utter nonsense the first time one heard them, but now it is clear that Azcan and the Arabian both learned their hoos from nature itself, from the wood-dove and the ocean. And in another early poem, the frequently anthologized "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon," that exalted Personage with whom the purple-gowned and fragrant tea guest (the state of guesthood, it should be said, is not explicit in the poem, but the hospitable social implications of the title are inescapable, and are directly related to Stevens' conception of the relation between imagination and society*) found himself more "truly and more strange," and proceeded to create an imaginative synthesis of the world, may very well be merely the personification of Azcan's wild woodnote, which the inchling with his preference for hard facts scorns so much.

In proclaiming himself to be "the personal," the inchling has merely mistaken the part for the whole, for it is clear that a true "personal" could not tolerate a dichotomy between the sensuous experience of external reality and imaginative knowledge any more than the person could be defined in terms of a single faculty. But the "scientific" bias of the inchling with his insolent cry to the imaginative life, "Begone!" reveals him content with fragmentary exist-

* Stevens has written: " . . . reality is life, and life is society and the imagination and reality, that is to say, the imagination and society are inseparable."

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ence and its consequent moral isolation. When the tea guest of Hoon proclaimed:

> *I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw*
> *Or heard or felt came not but from myself;*
> *And there I found myself more truly and more strange,*

he meant that he had recreated the external world in his imagination, and in doing so had elevated it onto a plane in which the world of fixed objects escaped its static and excluding definition in space. And so in the world of his imagination he was at last able to emerge from his moral isolation in himself. But the inchling, being the enemy of Azcan, although he may mistake his servitude for something else, is really held incommunicado in his own identity.

Apropos of this moral isolation in the material world, it is relevant to turn back to another early poem, "Metaphors of a Magnifico" (*Harmonium*), which Mr. Winters described as "willful nonsense":

> *Twenty men crossing a bridge,*
> *Into a village,*
> *Are twenty men crossing twenty bridges,*
> *Into twenty villages,*
> *Or one man*
> *Crossing a single bridge into a village.*

So far from being "willful nonsense," this is a deeply penetrating statement about the horror of such isolation. It means much the same thing as Eliot's

> Dayadhvam: *I have heard the key*
> *Turn in the door once and turn once only*
> *We think of the key, each in his prison*
> *Thinking of the key. . . .*

The key for Eliot is Christianity, the key for Stevens is imagination, and in *Dayadhvam* (meaning "sympathize," as Eliot has told us) both keys fit the same lock. For sympathy is a kind of common ground between the "vivid transparence" of the imagination in which Stevens meets his friend in the poem quoted below, and the Christian charity of Eliot's later work. The poetry of both is an attempt to overcome the moral isolation imposed by the modern world: and

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if Stevens, Azcan, the Capitan, and the Arabian are all tea guests at the Palaz of Hoon, there is no reason to suppose that Eliot with the third walking by his side is not also on friendly calling terms with that tremendous Personage. Only the inchling must go without his tea.

So we conclude that however much Azcan seems to fail the function he ought to be performing, the blame lies with the truculent inchling, who is a most uncooperative reality. And one should note that he turns away from insulting Azcan to point the Appalachian tangs of the pines, thereby bringing the good wildness of nature under control in the same way that the grey and bare jar on the Tennessee hill domesticated the wilderness. His "Begone!" is, in a sense, self-defensive, for he instinctively knows that the kind of relationship described in one of Stevens' most beautiful poems will never bind him to Azcan. This poem (the dedication of *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction*) describes the escape from moral isolation through the imagination:

> *And for what, except for you, do I feel love?*
> *Do I press the extremest book of the wisest man*
> *Close to me, hidden in me day and night?*
> *In the uncertain light of single, certain truth,*
> *Equal in living changingness to the light*
> *In which I meet you, in which we sit at rest,*
> *For a moment in the central of our being,*
> *The vivid transparence that you bring is peace.*

To achieve a very deep understanding of "Bantams in Pine-Woods" it must be read with some such wide range of reference to the other poems as has been indicated here. I say "some" because the references might easily have been to other poems than the ones actually selected in this paper. But this raises an extremely difficult problem of evaluation. By the time one has arrived at such a reading, it seems doubtful if one is really looking at the original poem any longer, or responding to it as it objectively exists. I said earlier that there is a sense in which a poet rewrites his collected works every time he writes a genuinely new poem, but there is also a sense in which both the poet and the interpreting critic can abuse the privileges implicit in this statement. I had chiefly in mind the increasing density of mean-

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ing in a vocabulary like Eliot's which has, as it were, passed with the inevitability of the natural world from a chilly spring to a ripening and abundant harvest. The progression in Stevens' poetry has been hardly less marked; but the vocabulary and images in his early poems are not saturated with the human experience that is the substance of Eliot's, and consequently an attempt to understand some of his poems is more like a project in archeological reconstruction than literary analysis. Admittedly the contemplation of pure craft (whatever that is), has its delight and value, but when the complex meaning of "Bantams in Pine-Woods" is finally deciphered (if I *have* deciphered it here), its relations to its symbols and images seem largely arbitrary. On the one hand we have an arrestingly grotesque visual image, delineated with something like Swift's clean sense of deformity, and some fantastically exhilarating noises; on the other, a complex and humanly important meaning. But the hostility between Azcan and the inchling (the imagination and reality) may, I think, be taken as an adequate symbol of the ultimate failure of this poem, (but I am not saying here that it does not have several remarkable *proximate successes*). If the poem means what I think it does, the meaning fails to be realized in the body of the verse. It is disowned by the very images that should proclaim it.

Before leaving, finally, this question of the interaction of images in Stevens' poetry, I should like to notice the presence of another of those "interacting veins of life" in the group of poems already quoted here. From Stevens' work as a whole we know that one of the intrinsic elements of the imagination (as of life) is motion and change. The inchling identifies himself in the second line of "Bantams in Pine-Woods" with his peremptory command to "halt!" And the principal activity manifested by the inchling is that of bristling—the characteristic behaviour of animals brought to bay rather than of animals in flight. "Single, certain truth" is in constant motion, is glimpsed and realized in moments of vital, vivid apprehension, and this act of apprehension itself may constitute ontologically a part, and perhaps a large part, of the truth. Turning back, now, to "The Pastor Caballero," one discovers that the Capitan's flaring hat-brim, itself the symbol of imagination and spiritual poise, is described as "grandiloquent gesture of a hand in rhapsody." We have in an astonishingly literal sense here not "language" but truth itself "as gesture."

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This theme of truth (or as Stevens prefers to call it, "fiction") as motion, change, gesture, recurs repeatedly throughout his poetry in varying degrees of complexity. We get it in its simplest form in a lovely early poem, "Infanta Marina" (*Harmonium*):

She made of the motions of her wrist
The grandiose gestures
Of her thought.
. . . .
And thus she roamed
In the roamings of her fan,
Partaking of the sea,
And of the evening,
As they flowed around
And uttered their subsiding sound.

The sea of which Marina partook is unmistakably the same sea that taught Azcan and the Arabian their hoos, and the evening throughout Stevens' verse has an even more suggestive connotation than the sea. One even feels a certain "prophecy" in that word "subsiding." To confine oneself to the quotations already given here, it surely carries a faint heralding of "the green flauntings of the hours of peace." But the important thing about "Infanta Marina" is that a delicate, trivial motion of the wrist is a means towards symbolizing the major end of life, and this end is conceived in terms of a motion that, from one point of view, is hardly separable from the moving wrist by which it is symbolized.

II

It was inevitable that in discussing Stevens' interaction of imagery the meaning of his poetry should have been considered; and it will be equally inevitable now that in examining primarily his meaning, a good deal will have to be said about the interaction of his images. Much has already been written on Stevens' meaning, the best article being R. P. Blackmur's; and if there has been radical disagreement among critics, there has been a consensus on certain important points, which should be enough to start the reader on his way. It is, of course, the early work that chiefly calls for elucidation.

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The group of poems called *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,* which, after Pound, (and counting Eliot in the English tradition), may easily be the most distinguished work written by an American poet in this century, is not particularly difficult to understand, nor, for that matter, is his most recent poem, *A Primitive like an Orb.* If the meaning in Stevens' poetry is again submitted to some scrutiny here, it is certainly not in the belief that anything surprisingly new can be said; but the substance of Stevens' poetry can be discussed in terms that incorporate it more firmly in a traditional context, and I think that is important: for Stevens' poetry has been too much discussed in terms of relativism, misology, Hedonism—even Bergsonianism. If several of these terms can be justified—and of course they can—the result is nevertheless that of dislodging Stevens' poetry from the tradition in which it seems to me most richly assimilable.

There is one difficulty to be guarded against especially in any discussion of meaning in Stevens' verse. Such a discussion is likely to get as far away from any consideration of the poetry itself as a discussion of Milton's theology can carry one away from *Paradise Lost.* The present brief examination hardly affords an opportunity for detailed discussion of the poetry, but I wish to examine two early poems with a view to seeing (at least in the second example) how much of Stevens' meaning is actually realized in terms of the verse. Beyond that concrete realization of his meaning in the body of the poetry, the further rational perspectives that may be drawn from it ought not to interest the literary critic, at least *as* critic. They are not his province. It will be seen, I think, that the part of Stevens' meaning which is poetically significant declares him to be an exponent of Coleridge's theory of the imagination; and in terms of this tradition rather than in any "modern" vocabulary one may be able to read his poetry with a new intimacy. I doubt if Stevens and Coleridge would have been much alike in any other way, but they seem to meet perfectly in, say, the final paragraphs of the chapter "On the Imagination," in *Biographia Literaria,* or, perhaps especially, in the conclusion of the following chapter, "Philosophic Definitions." And the Coleridgean imagination has become the theme of Stevens' poetry as a whole in a way it never became the theme of Coleridge's poetry as a whole. His theme is the reconciliation of opposites by intuitive vision, the discovery of unity in diversity—and in that phrase we move back to the

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problem of the Many and the One, which was the great passion of the Metaphysicals: and perhaps no contemporary poet has more associations (however tenuous and qualified) with the earlier seventeenth century than Stevens. But a comparison would hardly be fair to him, for it would tend to show how much better off they were than we, both in the concrete immediacy of their language and in the controlled precision of their abstractions.

"Poetry is the supreme fiction, Madame," Stevens had written in the opening line of "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman," that poem in *Harmonium* which had shocked Mr. Winters so much. And with that utterance, Stevens had proceeded to attempt a reconciliation of the conventionally irreconcilable. The poem is not much more than an effective piece of rhetoric, and the fusion fails to occur imaginatively, but the intention is clear. Stevens says that the High-Toned Old Christian Woman is aiming at very much the same sort of thing—perhaps less effectually—as the low-toned artists of whom she would hardly approve. Mr. Winters says of this: "we learn that the 'moral law' is not necessary as a framework of art, but that the 'opposing law' will do just as well. . . . " Read this poem as I may, I cannot discover any more sinister meaning in it than that High-Toned (surely that adjective is suggestive of the sort of Brahminism Stevens had in mind) Old Christian Women do not hold a monopoly of spiritual experiences. Both the perspectives of the Old Christian Woman and the "disaffected flagellants" open at last into similar palm-treeds vistas, for "fictive things wink as they will." In other words, the shaping spirit of imagination is transcendant.

To hold oneself a little longer to the progress of Mr. Winters' analysis of Stevens—the critic proceeds from a consideration of "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman" to one of the most rhythmically sensitive among Stevens' earlier poems, or for that matter, in the entire body of his work. The poem is somewhat inconsequently called, "The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad." Mr. Winters quite rightly reprints the original version of the poem as it appeared in its periodical publication rather than the seriously mutilated version in *Harmonium,* in which its beauty is ruinously damaged. Of this poem Mr. Winters has to say: "The poet has progressed in this poem to the point at which the intensity of emotion possible in actual human life has become insipid, and he conceives the possibility of ultimate satisfac-

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tion only in some impossible emotional finality of no matter what kind. In fact, the figurative opposites of summer and winter here offered suggest the opposites of the moral and the anti-moral which appear in 'A High-Toned Old Christian Woman'." Here is the poem in its complete version as Mr. Winters reprints it:

The time of year has grown indifferent.
Mildew of summer and the deepening snow
Are both alike in the routine I know:
I am too dumbly in my spirit pent.

The wind attendant on the solstices
Blows on the shutters of the metropoles,
Stirring no poet in his sleep, and tolls
The grand ideas of the villages.

The malady of the quotidian . . .
Perhaps if summer ever came to rest
And lengthened, deepened, comforted, caressed
Through days like oceans in obsidian

Horizons, full of night's midsummer blaze;
Perhaps, if winter once could penetrate
Through all its purples to the final slate,
Persisting bleakly in an icy haze;

One might in turn become less diffident,
Out of such mildew plucking neater mould
And spouting new orations of the cold.
One might. One might. But time will not relent.

The ennui which is being described here is something more than the punishment meted out to Hedonists. The "malady of the quotidian" which Stevens expresses with such deep poignancy is a characteristically human state that occurs at intervals in the best-regulated lives—and in spiritual writers its occurence, or the occurence of something very like it in a vastly aggravated form, is usually regarded as one of the more unpleasant symptoms of interior progress. But without wishing even to imply an analogy in that exalted direction, I would, at any rate, suggest that a comparison might profitably be made between this poem and Coleridge's *Dejection Ode,* which it

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curiously, if modestly, resembles. Although the emotion of direct sensuous experience has ceased to move the poet, a new and deeper emotion arises from knowledge of his incapacity to respond in the old key. The kind of satisfaction that Stevens is looking for in the second half of the poem hardly seems as degraded as Mr. Winters thinks. The desire is to go behind the fragmentary and transitory in experience and grasp its essentiality, no longer perceived in a context in which the elements are vulgarized ("The grand ideas of the villages"), and constantly being lost again through the fitfulness of forms and faculties at the very moment of apprehension. The desire is for the "vivid transparence" of peace—and if that peace would exclude some of the things that the High-Toned Old Christian Woman stood for, I do not believe that Stevens meant her as an adequate symbol for the best that has been said and thought in the Christian world. What the ultimate nature (in rigorous philosophical language) of the reality sought in such an absolute winter and perpetual summer would be is none of the critics' business. For the purposes of the poetry it plainly involves, like the earlier poem, a reconciliation of opposites towards comprehending the largest possible degree of reality, and in so doing it would conform to Coleridge's theory of the imagination—a creative willing together into a new and unified reality of hitherto separable quantities. It is the temporary cessation of this imaginative power that Stevens is talking about in this poem, just as Coleridge was lamenting its loss in his greatest poem—*The Dejection Ode*.

The imagery in this poem relates as closely to the later work as the poems previously considered here. But it is also perfectly self-contained, while its deeply personal rhythm offers a kind of satisfaction that cannot be derived from the rhetorical cadences of, say, "The Comedian as the Letter C.") Mr. Blackmur at one point in his treatment of Stevens' rhetoric invoked the name of Marlowe. Taking up his suggestive remark, I should say that this poem of Stevens compares to much of the remainder of *Harmonium* (particularly "The Comedian as the Letter C") as the best passages in *Dr. Faustus* compare to *Tamburlaine*. But although "The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad" is sufficient to itself, it is interesting to examine, in relation to it, these lines from the poem, "That Which Cannot Be Fixed" (*Transport to Summer*):

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The human ocean beats against this rock
Of earth, rises against it, tide by tide,

Continually. And old John Zeller stands
On his hill, watching the rising and falling, and says:

Of what are these creatures, what element
Or—yes: what elements, unreconciled

Because there is no golden solvent here.

The ocean in this poem is a symbol of chaotic human experience, composed, as we learn in an unquoted part, not from one element, but from the traditional four that are unreconciled among themselves because there is no golden solvent—that is, no fire of the imagination. Now in "The Man Whose Pharynx Was Bad" the ocean that is envisaged is really a human ocean in which the discords must also be reconciled—but instead of a "golden solvent," a different image is used—"obsidian horizons." Obsidian is volcanic glass, and therefore suggests the fiery fusing power of the imagination in the Coleridgean sense, and it looks forward to that lovely recurrent image of "transparency" in the later verse. The field of the imagination is not confined within the palings of time, and therefore the reality which it creates would naturally move through timeless seasons—and we see the world and life and time itself caught and crystallized in the moment of imagination, just as the mid-ocean is completely and eternally surrounded and defined by the encircling radiance of the sky. "The vivid transparence that you bring is peace"—that line provides an answer to the kind of dejection and longing in this poem on whose morals Mr. Winters has been so severe.

But if Mr. Winters and others have frequently thought of Stevens as an aesthete, and even a Hedonist—Stevens has not always been prudent about the poetry he has allowed to be published. Stevens used to be thought of as an unvoluminous writer, but in recent years, despite the excellence of *Transport to Summer* (undoubtedly his best volume), and what he has published since, he has allowed too many of his practice poems to appear. *Parts of a World* seems to me to number among its sixty-five titles very little of genuine distinction. For one thing, Stevens had progressed far enough

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in the expression of his meaning in his early volumes that a group of miscellaneous poems, all intent on saying, willy-nilly, pretty much the same thing in a wide (but related) variety of metaphors could add nothing to his achievement, and I frequently find the monotonous shadow of these poems falling over the real quality of his late work, and marring the purity of response. "A Dish of Peaches in Russia," for example, seems regrettable to me:

The peaches are large and round,

Ah! and red; and they have peach fuzz, ah!
They are full of juice and the skin is soft.

They are full of the colours of my village
And of fair weather, summer, dew, peace.

. . .

I did not know

That such ferocities could tear
One self from another, as these peaches do.

No doubt peaches can strike off imaginative feats in the proper observer, but that "and they have peach fuzz, ah!" leaves me uneasy. It doesn't seem to be leading up to the "ferocities" in the last verse. But Stevens' subject-matter cannot be condemned because it happens, in this poem, to have failed disastrously. A good artist is entitled to his failures (if only he wouldn't publish them), and the failure here is not one of theory but one of practice. Imagination as subject-matter (implicit here, of course) is bound to look a little mauve and decadent if, in a given instance, it is unable to strain beyond Fancy.

I have made a point of this poem because it seems suggestive in several ways about Stevens' development as a poet. The enamelled images of *Harmonium* had carried certain limitations of expression with them, but they were sometimes of great beauty and peculiar subtlety. If in the late 'thirties Stevens did not actually, as some competent critics imagined, acquire a social consciousness, there does appear to have been a shift in his mode of experiencing—a gradual change in his verse rhythms. What was happening had nothing to do

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with taking up the social burden, but there was a withdrawal in Stevens' poetry from the predominance of the image, and Stevens (perhaps partly because of the shock of the war, although the change had begun earlier) began to feel increasingly in terms of an inquisitive and flexible line—a line capable of making deeper explorations and wider applications of his images to social reality than had been possible in many of his earlier saffron-starched verses. *Parts of a World* is unsuccessful (but this is said with a view only to explaining the success of his later work) because the conspicuous metaphor is still making a strong bid for controlling interest, but is steadily being supplanted by a new rhythmical interest which follows more closely the movements of the questioning and generous mind. And yet neither a balance nor an interesting tension is usually achieved in this volume between the two elements. They behave towards each other with the easy nonchalance of bar companions, and this is the more remarkable in that some of the poems treat of the nature of poetry itself with unusual insight. In *Transport to Summer* (although the dates of the composition of the poems in these two volumes must have overlapped) the balance is righted, and *Notes toward a Supreme Fiction,* reprinted in this book, will possibly be Stevens' greatest achievement, and it should be one of the great adornments of American literature—a set of thirty meditations on the nature of the imagination.

Finally, we have another of Stevens' best poems, *A Primitive like an Orb*. In this poem the transition he has been making from an imagistically to a rhythmically controlled consciousness (this in itself implies something that might be mistaken for a social consciousness) is triumphantly completed; but not, it is interesting to note, without the assistance of Eliot's late poetry, which, without being derivative, it yet somehow resembles. It might be repetitious here to discuss this poem at any length, but I cannot drop the matter without commenting on the singular propriety of the title. We have seen how the adjective "primitive," as a term of general application, signifies the triumph of the imagination in the world of Stevens' meaning. As a work of art, "primitive" carries the same meaning, but focussed more insistently on the imagination's goal of operation. In this sense its opposition to the academic and conventional is almost rhetorical. But since the "Primitive" of the title aims at achieving an imaginative

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unity in diversity, at seeing the wholeness behind each fragment of experience, it is a primitive shaped like an orb. And the "orb" is nothing less than the age-old circle of perfection which can be symbolized even in a little drop of dew, of which Marvell wrote:

> . . . *the clear Region where 'twas born*
> *Round in itself encloses:*
> *And in its little Globes extent*
> *Frames as it can its native Element.*

III

Harmonium, good as it is, has been praised excessively at the expense of the late work, and the late work has a habit of being confused with "transition" work; but in spite of all such confusions Stevens is almost certainly (after the two exceptions earlier noted) the most considerable figure that American poetry has produced in this century. His meaning, insofar as it is operative within the fabric of his verse, has none of the immaturity that Winters accused it of, and it is large and coherent enough to form the basis of an important body of expression. Furthermore, its meaning is traditional, and it relates, in a way unusual in American art, to a European past. I do not mean that Stevens' poetry is a sycophant of Europe, but only that the tradition in which he thinks and feels and writes is not a provincial backwater. It is part of the main current, and one does not feel strange in speaking of him in relation to the great traditional non-American poets. He is validly related.

And he has a particular significance for our time. He has been immediately and painfully aware of the cultural disintegration that has closed in with such vehemence since the end of World War I. Perhaps in as intense a way as Yeats (the subject-matter of his poetry has been even more directly concerned) he has known that "the centre does not hold," and his Princeton lecture contains one or two of the most anguished passages dealing with our cultural tragedy that come to mind. It is in relation to his sense of the catastrophic fragmentariness of the contemporary world that his belief in the unifying power of the imagination has achieved such rare distinction. It cannot, in the nature of the case, offer a solution theoretically as

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complete as Eliot's Christianity, but it does offer a reality that sometimes seems to be almost the unbaptized blood-brother of Eliot's reality—and it is a reality that finds frequent, but by no means invariable, realization in the poetry itself.

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Albert Cook

THE SUNDERING

My hand presses open the glass door leading from the interior warmth of Widener's basement into the windless, crystalline cold of the Yard's open air. In late twilight the Yard lies deserted. It is the last evening before the Christmas vacation, the snow sparkles in white drifts and crunches underfoot, the air's purity expands to the blue night. I am refreshed at leaving the stuffy top floor of the library. For even the last class before the vacation brought the usual wrangle—Oh, as always, genteel!—with the flushing refugee philologist and the wide-eyed missionary's son who soldiered in India. I was in no mood to argue. Dorothy's letter, received this morning and freshly read, bulged my inside coat pocket; sunk in melancholy, I rankled at speaking. But as always there was an argument. Last week it was the meaning of *bhava,* today whether Krishna is consistent in identifying himself with *prakrti,* yet placing himself above it.

"But that is if you want *prakrti* No. 1 and *prakrti* No. 2, it makes it confusing semantically. I mean, the fellow himself appears not to have been precise about the thing in his own mind," stammered the philologist, drumming on the lexicon. He is none too happy anyway with the *Bhagavadgita;* it delights him with none of the rich linguistic tangle he finds in Bantu, Mongolian, or even the *Veda.* He seemed almost famished the other day when he pounced on the crumb of an interior samddhi, *vishvatomukham.* The missionary is worse, tilting his seat back to the window and becoming Krishna in his own mind. "But he *meant* to say that," with the enraptured smile of the lunatic who believes himself a saint without willing the extenuated askesis, the infinite inward doubt.

I can think of them only as arguing with each other, forever, on

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the stretches of the *Mahabharata,* in a hermetic room, the philologist thumbing through *Boethlingk and Roth,* the missionary sinking within his contented mind, till the end of time. But what I say usually occasions their arguments. And it did even today, when of all times I should have kept silent. "Fool, fool!" I tell myself, "Keep your mouth shut!" But I always open it, to knot my nerves in wretched futility. Only Professor Warren, staunch and obese, member of fourteen Oriental Societies, can placidly channel the talk (as he has for forty years and will for several more, sitting over a handful of students ten hours a week, the rest of the time reading his Hebrew, his Aeschylus, his Dante, walking in the woods behind his farm, and moving with dignified silence from acquaintance to acquaintance at the teas and dinner parties). In a way my presence and Professor Warren's caused the arguments always; if we had not been there, neither would have bothered coming to grips with the other.

I cannot imagine how I could have argued with those two adversaries an hour ago in the musty, overheated library, curtained and locked in with the Indian books as the twilight shadows grew more tender and profound at the sinking sun while the undertow hum of the heating plant whirred our anxiety to smooth froth: the furnace, crucible belly, and our top-floor room the dizzying brain of the firm building.

I had charged into the polite argument, but my definitions melted in the wind. Well, it is done, and I am alone at last to stare sadly at the elate sterility of red neon in the dark stores along Mass. Avenue. And to brood on her letter of separation, so tenderly written. . . .

Please don't think, Chuck, that Dad broke us up. Oh, I know he used to mope around the apartment whenever you came, but he does that with everybody. Honestly. I just don't think it's for the best, that's all. I don't understand you any more than I did that night at Fairbanks' when we first met each other. And God knows we've talked about it enough, and written about it. I'm terribly sorry you couldn't come out to Indianapolis this Christmas, so we might have seen each other beforehand. I could hug you close when I think of our walks around town at night, or sitting on the porch swing. But marriage is much, much more than that. . . .

How different this floundering from the sureness that gripped

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me when I saw her in Fairbanks' living room, talking with old Mrs. Fairbanks in the corner as she turned the record! She was so primped in her worn Sunday dress, waiting for the handful of soldiers to trickle in who had responded to the written card on the USO Bulletin Board. It was the middle of the week, and the trainees had to stay in camp. So I was the only one there that night; otherwise somebody else would have warmed to her after struggling through the awkwardness of mutual exploration. Afterwards her house was too near the Fairbanks', and we walked around the streets hand in hand till nearly one, though she had to work the next morning. Only after three dates did she take me to the musty third-floor apartment of that old house, where she lived with her father. His hours on the railroad were odd, but he always seemed to be there when I was. She forced herself to be cordial when she introduced us; he just grumbled in his galluses and sat down again to his paper. He was always there, and we had to sit on the porch or in the park, or when it got cold either walk or go to the movies. The possibility of my shipping overseas didn't hurry us. We both lounged in assurance that I'd stay at Fort Harrison. Still, my uniform made me seem more normal than I am and the war shed a light of competence and danger on my doings.

That first night the rift started, in our quarrel over Wagner and Tchaikowsky. She called me a snob; I mocked her as a sentimentalist. That hostility grew and grew, estranging us more than we could help, though we each reached out desperately for the other; or at least I did for her. She had always a few suitors on the fringes. Never again could we be as close, or as far, as last New Year's, when I let myself go at the end of our interminable talk, cutting with cruel voice the statue of the Sentimentalist, while she winced horribly on the sofa. How could I have let myself, how could I have done that to her? She said she would never forget it (nor will she, I'm sure), stormed out of the living room to bed, and told me to leave. Even the next night she would not embrace me till I left her, finding no other roomers still on the porch. The toll of my contumely stuns me; already it has lost me the woman who tugged like a moon on the tides of my blood (that pull did not fade at distance, nor at my discharge from the loneliness of the Army); and it will not console my almost certain failure in the years to come.

Why am I an Orientalist? In a sense by elimination. Law be-

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came impossible, then literature, then Classics, and everything else by revulsion, except medicine, and it's too late for that. It's certain, it must be, that I am unlike my fellows: in Sanskrit, the philologists furrowing grammars into their cerebrum, the Esoteric Buddhists; in Chinese, the admirers of Art (Dorothy doted on Chinese trinkets) and the proconsuls of the New Empire doing it along with Russian and law for High Office in the Far East. It is relevant to say that I am anxious, that the languages are plate after plate of armor against the hate of the world and the possibility always of finding myself before a machine pushing cans along an assembly line. The same reason I hoard my pennies, like my father—though it does me no good. I could not rest easy to take a Christmas vacation now after what I spent last year. So I will stick around, work a little, and meditate in the vacant apartment. Two or three times Bill Barker, poor, violent, and sterile, will drop around for dinner and blow off about his play. Which he might get started if he took off for Chicago this week and abandoned this bog of doubt and fatigue.

If I had to work now, things might be different. It is my money status, the backlog of three more years' GI Bill, that gives me my detachment toward the past, my lack of ambition toward my present studies, my languid unconcern for the future. Like the student in Dostoevsky's story who lives on a small inheritance, the paucity of my money makes me a pariah, albeit if I wished I could cultivate the shabby gentility to which my fellow students take like ducks to water. And that the money is gained without work from remote coffers (in the case of Dostoevsky's student, from a dead relative; in mine, from the anonymous State on whose conveyor belt I was joggled for three years) makes me objective without creation, an unspeaking observer of all passers-by, an incurious dabbler in orientalia, the underground man of intellectual life who stomps through books as T. E. Lawrence through training in the Royal Air Force. I am less free of money than ever now, which will be the stamp of my failure as I grow older. Money, money, money! My Sanskrit and Chinese won't help me there; the only road would be academic pomp, which I loathe. They will only make me the curiosity of some branch office in an exporting company, the dead end of my apathy.

Dorothy at least showed no concern for money. Like most midwesterners, she took it for granted that I'd earn a living some way, and

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let it go at that. From the time I denuded her folly, and she was unable or disinclined to retaliate, it was clear that we were through. I can't really explain it. All the solicitude of last Easter, of the whole August I spent in the city heat, rooming in Indianapolis because I knew there could be no other image as incandescent as she—all that could not restore us to what we had been. We were done from that New Year's Eve and the rest has been only pain. Those tumultuous years we grew together she was woven inextricably into my flesh, woven as no other could ever be. And now I shall never see her again, never.

It is only three quarters of an hour till dinner time, when I will wretchedly savor my food mouthful by mouthful in the restaurant din. I could go to a movie before returning to the empty boarding house (they have left for the train, one by one, all day long, and I am the last who remains) but there's never anything playing. The air wakens me, I feel fresh, though never have I been more forlorn than now in this dark universe, this heap of dead rocks, this grotesquerie of brick buildings, snowy forests, white seas, and all the rest. Though genial fall is gone, the only thing left to do is the long walk up Brattle Hill in the snow and under the stars, past the shuttered houses set far back from the street. There my sole joy will be to scale the tensions of my grief like a concerto, pure wanderer in the winter cold, explorer moving past the milestones of failure to the dead end of time.

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Karl Shapiro

GOING TO SCHOOL

What shall I teach in the vivid afternoon
With the sun warming the blackboard and a slip
Of cloud catching my eye?
Only the cones and sections of the moon
Out of some flaking page of scholarship,
Only some foolish heresy
To counteract the authority of prose.
The ink runs freely and the dry chalk flows
Into the silent night of seven slates
Where I create the universe as if
It grew out of some old rabbinic glyph
Or hung upon the necessity of Yeats.

O dry imaginations, drink this dust
That grays the room and powders my coat sleeve,
For in this shaft of light
I dance upon the intellectual crust
Of our own age and hold this make-believe
Like holy work before your sight.
This is the list of books that time has burned,
These are the lines that only poets have learned,
The frame of dreams, the symbols that dilate;
Yet when I turn from this dark exercise
I meet your bright and world-considering eyes
That build and build and never can create.

I gaze down on the garden with its green
Axial lines and scientific pond
And watch a man in white

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Stiffly pursue a butterfly between
Square hedges where he takes it overhand
Into the pocket of his net.
Ah psyche, sinking in the bottled fumes,
Dragging your slow wings while the hunt resumes.
I say, "He placed an image on the pool
Of the Great Mind to float there like a leaf
And then sink downward to the dark belief
Of the Great Memory of the Hermetic School."

I say, "Linnaeus drowned the names of flowers
With the black garlands of his Latin words;
The gardens now are his,
The drug-bright blossoms of the glass are ours.
I think a million taxidermist's birds
Sing in the mind of Agassiz
Who still retained one image of the good,
Who said a fish is but a thought of God.
—This is the flat world circled by its dogs,
This is the right triangle held divine
Before bald Euclid drew his empty line
And shame fell on the ancient astrologues."

The eyes strike angles on the farther wall,
Divine geometry forms upon the page,
I feel a sense of shame.
Then as the great design begins to pall
A cock crows in a laboratory cage
And I proceed. "As for the name,
It is the potency itself of thing,
It is the power-of-rising of the wing;
Without it death and feathers, for neither reed
Of Solomon nor quill of Shakespeare's goose
Ever did more or less than to deduce
Letter from number in our ignorant creed."

And what if he who blessed these walls should walk
Invisibly in the room? — My conscience prates,

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Jorge Luis Borges

EMMA ZUNZ

On the fourteenth of January 1922, Emma Zunz, upon returning from the textile mill of Tarbuch and Loewenthal, found at the farthest end of the corridor a letter postmarked in Brazil, by which she knew that her father had died. At first, the stamp and the envelope deceived her; then, she was disturbed by the unknown handwriting. Nine or ten smudged lines nearly filled the paper; Emma read that Mr. Maier had accidentally drunk a strong dose of narcotic and had passed away on the third of the month at the hospital of Bagé. The letter was signed by one of her father's boarding-house companions, a Fein or Fain, from Rio Grande, who could not possibly know that he was addressing the daughter of the deceased.

Emma let the letter drop. Her first reaction was that of pain in the stomach and the knees; then one of blind guilt, of unreality, of cold and fear; then she was eager for the next day to come. But at once she realized that such a wish was useless because the death of her father was the only thing which had happened in the world, and would continue to happen endlessly. She picked up the letter and went to her room. She concealed it furtively in a drawer, as if in some way she already knew the events which were to follow. Perhaps she had already begun to visualize them; what was to be had already begun.

In the growing darkness, Emma wept till the end of that day over the suicide of Manuel Maier, who in former happy days had been Emanuel Zunz. She recalled summer vacations on a small isolated farm, near Gualeguay, she recalled (tried to recall) her mother, she recalled the little house at Lanus which had been sold at auction, she recalled the yellow rhombs on a window, she recalled the prison car, the humiliation, she recalled the anonymous letters in open envelopes about "the cashier's embezzlement"; she recalled (but this she had never forgotten) that on the last night

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her father had sworn to her that the thief was Loewenthal. Loewenthal, Aaron Loewenthal, formerly the manager of the factory, and now one of its owners. Since 1916, Emma had kept the secret. She had revealed it to no one, not even to her best friend, Elsa Urstein. Perhaps she was trying to escape profane incredulity; perhaps she felt that the secret was a bond between her and her absent father. Loewenthal did not realize that she knew; Emma Zunz derived from this fact a feeling of power.

She did not sleep that night, and when the first morning light outlined the rectangle of the window, her plan was perfectly made. She tried to live that day, which seemed interminable, as if it were any other day. There were rumors about a strike at the factory. As always, Emma declared herself against any violence. At six, the end of the workday, she went with Elsa to a woman's club, where they could use the gymnasium and pool. They signed their names; she had to repeat and spell her first and second name, and had to laugh at the vulgar jokes that accompany such repetition. She discussed with Elsa and the youngest daughter of the Kronfusses to which movie they would go the following Sunday afternoon. Then the conversation turned to boy friends, and no one expected Emma to speak. In April she would be nineteen, but even now men inspired her with an almost pathological fear. . . . On her return, she prepared a tapioca soup and some vegetables; she ate early, went to bed, and forced herself to sleep. Thus, painfully and trivially, passed the eve of Friday the 15th.

On Saturday, impatience awoke her. Impatience, not nervousness, and the strange relief because *the* day had finally arrived. She no longer had to scheme and imagine; within a few hours she would reach the simplicity of facts. She read in *La Prensa* that the Nordstjärnen of Malmö would sail from pier 3; she telephoned Loewenthal, insinuating that she wished to communicate to him, secretly, something about the strike, and she promised to stop at his office at nightfall. Her voice trembled; the trembling was appropriate for an informer. No other fateful event took place that morning. Emma worked until noon and arranged with Elsa and Perla Kronfuss the minor details of the plans for Sunday. After lunch, she went to bed and, with eyes closed, reviewed the plan she had worked out. She thought that the last stage would be less horrifying than the first, and

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that she would feel satisfaction in victory and justice. Suddenly, alarmed, she rose and ran to the drawer. She opened it; underneath the portrait of Milton Sills, where she had left it the night before, was the letter from Fain. No one could have seen it; she began to read it and then tore it up.

To tell with some accuracy the events of that afternoon would be difficult and almost improper. Unreality is an attribute of evil, an attribute which seems to mitigate its terrors and which, perhaps, aggravates them. How can one make believable an act in which the perpetrator herself almost did not believe? How can one recapture that momentary chaos which even today the memory of Emma Zunz repudiates and confuses? Emma lived near Almagro, on Liniers street; we know that that afternoon she went to the pier. Perhaps on Paseo de Julio she saw herself multiplied in the mirrors, felt publicized by the lights and undressed by hungry eyes; but it is more reasonable to suppose that at first, because of her inexperience, she wandered through the indifferent market place. . . . She went into two or three bars, she watched the routine of the other women. At last, she came upon the men from the Nordstjärnen. She passed up a very young one, who, she feared, would arouse in her feelings of tenderness, and she decided upon another, smaller than herself and crude, so that the purity of the horror might not be mitigated. The man led her to a door, through a dark corridor, up a winding stairway, to a vestibule (which had window panes with flowers like those at the house at Lanús), and then through a passage-way to a door which closed behind them. These grave events are outside of time, either because the immediate past is cut off from the future by them, or because the parts which form them do not seem to be continuous.

At such a time, outside of time, in that perplexing disorder of disconnected and odious sensations, did Emma Zunz think at least once of the dead man who motivated such sacrifice? I am of the opinion that she did think of him once, and that in that moment her desperate object was endangered. She thought (she could not help but think) that her father had done this terrible thing to her mother, this thing that she was suffering now. She thought this with weak astonishment and at once took refuge in dizziness. The man, a Swiss or a Finn, did not speak Spanish; he was a tool to her just as she was a tool to him, but she served for pleasure, and he for justice.

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When she was alone, Emma did not open her eyes at once. On the night table there was the money which the man had left. Emma raised herself and tore it up, just as she had torn the letter. To tear money is an impiety, such as throwing away bread. Emma felt sorry, as soon as she had done it. An act of pride and on that day. . . . Her fear was lost into the sorrow of her body and into revulsion. Revulsion and grief chained her, but Emma got up slowly and began to dress. In the room no bright colors were left; the last light of day was fast dying. Emma was able to leave without being noticed; on the corner she got on a Lacroze, going west. According to her plan, she took a seat in the front, so that no one could see her face. Perhaps she was comforted to find that, in the midst of the noise of the streets, what had just happened had not contaminated anything. She traveled through smaller and duller quarters, seeing them and forgetting them at once, and she got off on the corner of Warnes. Paradoxically, her fatigue turned into strength, for she was obliged to concentrate on the details of the plan, and she lost awareness of the substance and end of it.

Aaron Loewenthal was, in the eyes of everyone, a serious man; for the few who knew him, he was a miser. He lived alone, occupying the floor over the factory. Living in a slum, he feared thieves; in the yard of the factory he had a big dog and kept a revolver in the drawer of his desk. A year ago he had wept, with decorum, over the sudden death of his wife—a Gauss, who had brought him a good dowry—but money was his real passion. Inside himself, he knew that he was less able to earn than to hoard it. He was very religious; he felt that he had a secret pact with the Lord which excused him from good behavior, in return for prayers and piety. Bald, heavy set, in mourning, wearing dark pince-nez, he was standing, at the window, waiting for the confidential report of the employee Zunz.

He saw her open the gate (which he had purposely unlocked) and cross the yard. He saw her make a little detour when the tied dog barked. Emma's lips moved as the lips of those who pray in a low voice move; tired, they repeated the sentence which Mr. Loewenthal was to hear before dying.

Things did not happen as Emma Zunz had thought they would. Since the preceding dawn, she had imagined herself many times, pointing the firm revolver, forcing the miserable man to confess his

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miserable sin, and explaining the daring stratagem by which the Justice of God would triumph over human justice. She did not wish to be punished, not because of fear, but because she was an instrument of justice. Then, a single shot in the middle of his chest would seal the fate of Mr. Loewenthal. But things did not happen in this way.

When facing Aaron Loewenthal, Emma felt the urgency of avenging the outrage she had suffered, rather than the urgency of avenging the death of her father. She could not help killing him after this absolute dishonor. Neither did she have time to lose in theatricalities. Sitting down and afraid, she excused herself, claimed (being an informer) the responsibilities of loyalty, mentioned some names, implied others and stopped, as if fear had cut her short. She succeeded in making Loewenthal go out to get a cup of water. When he, incredulous of such fear, but indulgent, returned to the dining room, Emma had already taken out the heavy revolver from the desk-drawer. She pulled the trigger twice. The huge body fell as if the noise and the smoke had cut it down, the glass of water broke, the face looked at her with astonishment and anger, the mouth of the face cursed her in Spanish and in Yiddish. The evil words would not let up; Emma had to shoot once more. In the yard, the chained dog began to bark, and a flow of thick blood oozed from his obscene lips and soiled his beard and suit. Emma began to speak the accusation that she had prepared ("I have avenged my father and they will not punish me. . . . "), but she did not finish it because Mr. Lowenthal had already died. She never knew whether he had understood her at all.

The persistent barking of the dog reminded her that she could not yet rest. She disarranged the couch, unbottoned the coat of the dead man, took off his soiled pince-nez and put it on the cabinet file. Then she picked up the telephone and repeated what she was to repeat so many times, in these and other words: "Something incredible has happened. . . . Mr. Loewenthal asked me to come on pretext of the strike. . . . He abused me, and I killed him. . . . "

It was an unbelievable story, but was finally believed by everyone, because it was essentially true. The tone of Emma Zunz was true, her shame was true, her hate was true. The abuse she had suffered was also true; only one or two proper names were false.

(*Translated from the Spanish by E. C. Villicaña*)

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BOOKS

THE END OF MODERN LITERATURE

We are told that this is the century when man has become for the first time fully and thoroughly problematic to himself. If so, it would only seem natural that literature too should be posed as a new and extreme kind of problem for literary men. Natural and inevitable too, that this problem should be raised particularly by the French, whose literature, whatever its rank, has always been the most programmatic of all literatures, and the most self-consciously attached to critical theory. For some time now French critics have been talking about a "crisis" in their literature. "Crisis" is a violent word, and there has possibly been some over-dramatization in its use; but there can be no doubt about the seriousness of the situation that has evoked this word: French literature suggests a countryside overrun by generations of industrious cultivators until the point of diminishing returns seems reached, where the soil continues to yield crops only after exacting very much more drastic methods of cultivation and ever more painful labor. By the turn of the century some traditional genres already looked exhausted, and recently some French writers have been declaring that the language itself (so much narrower in its range of effects than our protean English) demands new means of expression. American literature is very far from reaching this stage, and perhaps we are wrong to bother our heads at all with asking any extreme or ultimate questions of literature; we are primitives and perhaps for the time being we shall do better to remain such; but if we do choose to think about the problem of literature as a total one, then we can learn much from seeing this problem raised within the French context, which may very well represent the extreme state toward which modern literature, so long as it still remembers its ambitions, is tending everywhere in the world.

The background of Sartre's book* is this continuing crisis in French literature. But he is also beset by another and much more urgent crisis—

* *What Is Literature?* By Jean-Paul Sartre. Philosophical Library. $4.75.

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the condition of French and European society after the Second World War—which penetrates so much of European life now that it places the writer in a precarious relation even to his craft. It is very useful to us to have a writer like Sartre confront this double crisis. By this time it seems clear that he is not, nor is likely to become, a great writer: clever, enormously, furiously energetic, he does not possess the authentic gifts of a really first-rate creative talent. But in the present case this may be no disadvantage: a greater writer, for whom literature itself might never become a question, might be less sensitive to the historic forces that now push the literary man into such an odd and difficult place in the world. And what we can always count on in Sartre is the prodigious intelligence (however it may miscarry in details) with which he plunges into any problem. Sartre divides the problem of literature into three questions: *What is writing? Why write? For whom does one write?* These questions themselves breathe the air of crisis, for they are not the kinds of question that enter the writer's head during his periods of fertility and overflow; they become urgent and sometimes paralyzing for him only when he has descended into the pits of silence, anguish, artistic nihilism; when he exists on the margins of literature where language itself seems to become impossible. But since the writer cannot exist without descending from time to time into these waste places, these are questions that cannot be shirked, and it is better to raise and try to answer them whenever we can than to wait till the heavy silence descends and makes their answer seem hopeless.

Coming out of this double crisis in the French situation, Sartre's book is really a revolutionary one, though he himself gives the rather odd impression of not quite grasping the real revolution he announces. He hardly presents us any radically new theory of literature: most of Sartre's views had their antecedents in the Marxist theorizing of the 'thirties, though he gives them a new philosophical color. The revolutionary import of Sartre's message lies in his complete acceptance of the conditions under which, it appears, the writer may soon have to work, even though to accept these conditions may imply a radical break with the whole tradition of literature in France. Thus his book is revolutionary as a symptom of what is happening to literature, culture, and human society in this epoch—and not only in France.

Sartre attempts to give a historical answer to the three questions that divide his book by reviewing the conditions of author, public, and society during the major periods of French literature. This history is sketched in large rapid strokes: the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth or bourgeois century; the present period (the situation of the writer in

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1947) and Sartre's hope for the future. Inevitably the treatment of history shows more of the influence of Marx and Hegel than of Existentialism. Sartre has obviously profited a good deal from a sympathetic reading of Hegel, but the Hegelian apparatus often seems unnecessary and cumbrous, and his use of it an exuberant but self-indulgent practice of virtuosity. The influence of Marxism shows itself in another direction: it actually forms Sartre's judgments of taste at certain points. Thus he undervalues the literature of the seventeenth century because it was aristocratic, actually preferring the comedies of Beaumarchais, which belong to the more democratic eighteenth century, to those of Moliere, and going so far as to describe Moliere's *Le Misanthrope* as a comedy dealing only with the trivial subject of manners. The trouble is not that Sartre lacks taste—the whole book is evidence of his passionate addiction to literature—but that, as usual, he is driven too furiously by his ideas into the violation of perceptible fact—here the perceptible facts of taste. The result is that the brilliance of his insights on the past is often spoiled by extreme and doctrinaire judgments.

This lack of critical balance has its most serious consequences when Sartre is dealing with the bourgeois literature of the nineteenth century. Here Sartre's judgments are obviously colored by his passionate hatred of the bourgeois class itself, and in this respect he reveals the state of mind of France, and indeed of all Europe, where the bourgeoisie is so discredited that the unpleasant associations of the word reflect back on the whole century of civilization dominated by that class. We in America who have not yet had to live through the ruin of that class are still permitted another point of view: as bourgeois civilization—in France, England, and elsewhere—disappears, it is possible to regret its passing and to question very seriously the superiority of the culture that is replacing it. Though Sartre makes some telling points against bourgeois literature, they are usually directed at its weakest side and hardly do justice to its main bulk of significant work. Sartre's error is the familiar one of seeking to convert political and social sympathies too directly into literary judgment, so that he accepts much too simply and wholeheartedly the plebeian or populist taste embedded in the Marxist mind. In general, it can be said of Sartre that he has come to Marxism too late, that he has not lived through it and beyond it, so that he still sees political and cultural realities under the too drastic Marxist simplifications. The facts, however, are always more complex. Flaubert, to take one example, has always been a target for Sartre, and in this book Sartre attempts to justify his severity by citing long passages from Flaubert's letters that express an aristocratic hatred of the mob. This is all very well;

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but then we are suddenly reminded of the human complications of literary composition when we recall that Flaubert, despite his correspondence, has produced in the few pages of *Un Coeur Simple* a more profound and sympathetic picture of the poor than in all the thousand pages of Sartre's recent trilogy. And if we are going to insist at all on the social role of literature, we may as well remember that it was the bourgeois epoch which first produced the conception of a literature embracing the whole of society in a single understanding vision.

All this brings us now to the core of Sartre's message, which is of course his now well-known concept of *littérature engagée,* where we will also be dealing with some of the hazy notions left in the American mind by the "social-consciousness" of the 'thirties. ("Engaged literature," by the way, is a piece of linguistic nonsense that the translator might have spared us; if some of the literal force of the French is to be kept, he might have rendered it as "enlisted literature," which is the connotation to French ears; but, all told, "engagement" is probably best done into English as *commitment.*) Sartre complains that he has been misunderstood, but despite all his efforts in this book his idea of commitment still remains somewhat unclear. He has still not dealt adequately with the kinds and degrees of commitment, nor with the question of the necessary *artistic* detachment that must accompany the writer's *human* commitments. It is easy to be sympathetic to the causes that prompt Sartre's doctrine. The most eloquent pages in this book are those on the French experience under the German occupation, which make it quite clear that after such experiences the writer could no longer immure himself in an aestheticism for which neither concentration camps, executioners, nor victims would exist. We can very well accept the decisive force of such experiences for the young men of Sartre's generation. But then, can this experience be generalized for the writer everywhere and allowed to circumscribe his material, methods, and attitudes?

The point is, again, that the writer's involvement is a more complicated matter than Sartre allows. Commitment may work on various levels and in various degrees: the detached writer sometimes turns out to be the most committed at a deeper level, and the most blatantly committed writer to have only a transitory connection with the deeper issues of history, society, and literary tradition. Proust complains in one of his letters of the criticism (made after the first volumes of his novel had already appeared and been acclaimed) that his was the work of a snob, showing no recognition of social (by which was meant socialist) ideas. The criticism was in fact just, in the sense that the socialist ideology

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plays no role at all in the work of Proust. Yet, by some curious irony of detachment not at all unusual in works of art, *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu* is a profounder study of the breakdown of a social class than anything given us by proletarian or "social realist" literature. No modern writer seems to offer us a more fanatical example of detachment than Joyce. Certainly, during the seventeen years in which he was composing his last work, withdrawn from the ideological battles of the 'twenties and 'thirties, he seemed a curiously eccentric and private figure. Yet the appearance of *Finnegans Wake* in 1939 coincided portentously with the outbreak of a War that seemed the destruction of the whole civilization so laboriously embedded in Joyce's pages, and by some miracle of literary creation the book seemed to sum up a whole epoch. Was Joyce a committed writer? It depends, of course, on what kinds of commitment one has in mind. Joyce was committed in the deepest sense to the fact of human language, and consequently to the whole literary tradition in which he was working; he drew deeply upon the modern consciousness in matters like anthropology and psychoanalysis; and beyond all these, he had a human commitment, which became also the writer's deepest message, to the most primitive and universal emotions of familial life. In the face of such formidable commitments, the absence of a political ideology looks like a rather superficial deficiency in Joyce. The examples could be multiplied, but the point that emerges from them is already clear: we demand of the writer a commitment to his time in the sense that his work incorporate contemporary mind and feeling at their deepest levels; but to exist deeply in one's time is not the same as to exist in the spotlight, to pass oneself off as a political leader or sage, and to lose oneself in all the more violently public currents. Withdrawal and silence may open to the writer resources that reflect his time at a profounder level than those works which—in their insistence on being relevant, committed, or conscripted—are only a step beyond the daily newspaper. Some of Sartre's recent work gives the impression of a man writing with the Zeitgeist breathing hotly down his neck.

In the broad human sense, no doubt, Sartre is in the right direction. His doctrine is an insistence upon the reintegration of literature into life, against the idea of the priesthood of letters that germinated during the whole of the nineteenth century to come to full and final bloom in Flaubert and the symbolists. Mallarmé put it perfectly when he said, "Everything exists in order to get into a book," willing to countenance the inversion of existence that would subordinate the man to the writer. Our own period hardly permits this attitude: we have to insist that the writer is a man, that he never leaves humanity, and that, living in his

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period, he has political opinions like everybody else. But expecting the writer to be a citizen, we should not also expect that the literary profession gives him any special privileges of trespass into politics. Politics is usually considered fair game for everybody, and literary men have sometimes been the worst offenders, confusing their vaguest feelings with facts, their rhetoric with logic, and their will to belong with moral heroism. Sartre's own forays into politics show a good deal of this naiveté and confusion. It is time we recognized that there is such a thing as "literary" politics, to be taken no more seriously than "literary" philosophizing, "literary" psychology, and the rest of these adulterated products. During the 'thirties, of course, "literary" politics was the universal pastime; the mood of the period was some excuse, but that period has now passed, and literary men and fellow-travelers ought to be told that politics is a special discipline, with its own data and rules, concerning which one ought occasionally to think before one talks.

But the real revolution that Sartre announces for literature is not a matter chiefly of politics. He hardly states this revolution in so many words; we glimpse it only if we measure his theory by his practice, taking the present book along with his novels and plays, which are, after all, his deliberate attempts to realize his own projects for literature; and only too if we read a little between the lines in the present work, observing the writers to whom he makes most frequent and essential reference. Sartre once said that Dos Passos was the greatest modern novelist; in the present work his admiration for American writers is more cautious than in the past, but we notice repeated reference to Richard Wright as a great writer. This is entirely natural, for Wright's books, dealing with the Negro question in America, satisfy Sartre's demand that literature be directed at changing the fundamental conditions of social existence. The highbrow critic in America is likely to settle on altogether different names in any fundamental literary discussion: Joyce or Eliot or Proust are the names that remind us of the possible ambitions of literature. Sartre, however, is interested in a very practical program for literature, and his point would seem to be effectively this: that in the crisis of exhaustion, or threatened exhaustion, in which French literature now seems to find itself, the way out may be just to propose the second-rate as an ideal. Perhaps, being second-rate, it is something within reach, and therefore a thoroughly practicable goal for literature. In the sense that his book represents a deliberate abnegation from the great ambitions of modern literature, Sartre is in effect announcing the end of a whole literary period.

For the fact is that the one thing that distinguishes modern litera-

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ture as a whole from the literature of previous periods is its extraordinary, and perhaps even overweening, ambition. We are now at the midpoint of the century, and looking back on the half-century of writers who will eventually give their names to the period, we seem to see them in retrospect as belonging almost to a vanished culture, so different were the conditions of their existence from those of the period into which we are now entering. If they inherited the nineteenth-century view of the writer as a separate and anointed being, a kind of priest, they were able to hold on to this role only with the tensions of an irony that provided it with a new human content. Proust, Joyce, Mann and the others, all exist in the full plenitude of a tradition, of which they sought to lose no part, so that their work in its richness already carries the seeds of disorder and dissolution. Probably a moment like this in literary history could not be prolonged any further. Sartre's is perhaps the first conscious announcement that the conditions of literature must return to a lower and less ambitious level; but even if the program did not become conscious, the attitude has already begun to prevail generally. We are now able to understand our surprise at the evolution of Sartre's career. The discrepancy between the very abstract and involved philosophy and the rudimentary and plodding fiction is no longer a puzzle. It was something of a shock, after the intellectual sophistication and complexity of *L'être et le néant,* to descend upon the first volume of Sartre's trilogy, not because his creative gifts were lacking but because he was willing to aim so low in the novel. But all this now turns out to have been intentional: the deliberate aiming at the second-rate is part of Sartre's program for literature. The committed writer disdains the creation of masterpieces, and even the very concept of the masterpiece, with whatever silence, exile, or cunning it may exact, no longer seems to have any connection with that act of writing that aims essentially at making an impact, just as one might strike a blow or fire a pistol.

Sartre is therefore entirely consistent with himself when he proposes that the writer neglect none of the mass media, like radio and cinema, available in this period. He notes with satisfaction that the modern writer is able to reach a much vaster audience than his predecessor of the nineteenth century: for Sartre this is the great opportunity in the present situation. It is true that he also observes the other side of the coin—that when Gide, for example, becomes known through the cinema to thousands who have not read him, the writer also becomes inseparable from the face of Michele Morgan—but he fails to consider what will happen if this process continues unchecked. The cultural process in modern society (which, whatever its form of economy, is

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everywhere becoming a mass society) is precisely this watering down of content as the writer reaches larger masses of people, and usually not through his own written word but through the mechanical image that an advanced technology substitutes for the printed page. Sartre accepts the process, in fact seeks to assist it; for in his view the writer should aim essentially at addressing the concrete collectivity, which is the total mass of mankind, and eventually this mass is a classless society. This is as utopian as most of Sartre's politics; but programs—and a program for literature is no exception—should deal with present possibilities, and the contemporary writer who seeks to reach this mass audience will inevitably find himself rejecting his own essential difficulties, his complications and subtleties, and indeed the very limitations of personality that have in the past defined his most authentic themes. Here again we have nothing less than a proposal to put an end to modern literature. For the qualities that define modern literature have been in great part the result of a desperate effort to preserve itself by a deliberate escape from a mass audience.

It would be a mistake, however, to discount too easily Sartre's attitudes toward literature as simply the result of his own unhappy will to have a political vocation. We would be right in part, but we would be wrong to forget the more significant question why the writer today should be so furiously haunted by the need to search for such a vocation. Sartre's position might be very different without the large and vocal presence of the Communists upon the French scene: the writer of *La Nausée,* in becoming the leader of a school, has had to sacrifice himself to the public figure who is drawn into competition with the Communists and has had consequently to offer a message emphasizing more and more the "positive" and social role of literature. It is very significant, thus, that the discussion of the present situation of the writer in 1947, with which this book concludes, should be in large part an unequivocal attack upon communism as a moral and intellectual phenomenon (a section which, along with his destruction of the literary theories of surrealism, represents Sartre at his polemic best); but it is even more significant of the ambiguous situation of the French writer now that Sartre's anti-communism on the political level has been so very much less equivocal. Communism and communist ideology do not play the same role in America; but in this respect the French situation may not be so much different as simply in advance of our own, and what we must be prepared for all over the world is a literature produced under the conditions of a mass society, whatever may be the political regime imposed upon this mass base. The end of modern literature, however, does not mean the

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end of literature. We may regret the passing of a period, but lamentation cannot become the content of a critical doctrine. In the new period which we are now entering the literary medium may discover new forms and adventures for itself: for one thing, the social process in which the writer is now caught up may put an end to his famous alienation in our time, and a literature with very different possibilities may result. Unfortunately all this is still very much in the future, while right now I do not think there can be much doubt that these new conditions are producing, and will probably produce for some time, a literature that is plainly inferior to the old.

William Barrett

UBIQUITOUS OBLIQUE

THE BODY. By William Sansom. Harcourt, Brace. $2.75.
TWO WORLDS AND THEIR WAYS. By Ivy Compton-Burnett. Alfred A. Knopf. $3.50.

There has been a curious change in William Sansom. *The Body,* his first novel, is a break with his own past. He belonged to the group of young British writers who work in the Kafka tradition, presumably in the hope of creating a new, major art form. Sansom's short stories (*Fireman Flower*) had reached a point where great expectations were not unreasonable. He had availed himself of the best in Kafka, the structure that can be turned any way to fit modern life, the analogues of experience, the philosophical tone. But he has dropped all this, just when one might have expected him to carry it further.

Perhaps the writer's pride objected to doing imitations. More charitably construed ("working within the tradition"), his break may have been motivated by a desire to escape confinement, to work on his own terms. Only for Kafka was the manner the man. For the rest it is something like a magician's trick, presto, it works!—the tree springs full grown without seed, casting a profound shade. But life grows pale in this shade, and the merest reality, first reckoned well lost, becomes irresistible, not for its own quality, but because it lies out of range. Before long, it is not the trick that appears magical to the artist, but the ordinary, untouched part of the world.

It may be for such reasons that *The Body* is entirely assembled of unused parts, sounds, colors, textures, freckles, hair, shop windows,

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suburban types and their pleasures, a catalogue of everything that Sansom had never before been able to approach. He is determined to let no chance of describing actual experience go by, and once he gets the feel of things, he forgets when to let go. The story is often by-passed. This is about Henry Bishop, a middle-aged man in a London suburb, who suffers an episode of jealousy and delusion, suspecting his wife, Madge, of an affair with the next-door neighbor, Charley Diver. But this theme is neglected for the treatment, and adultery sinks to the level of any stock anecdote, murder, blackmail, the missing papers, upon which one can play suspense. Sansom comes near the thriller in his absorption with special effects: in the background there is always a freak show, trick lights, the grotesque. Only once does he work free of this strain, in the chapter where he takes his characters boating on the Thames. Here, Bishop's suspicions and maneuvers to trap Charley and his wife take on reality from the natural setting, the writing has a sweep it lacks elsewhere, the writer has no need of intellectual passages to proclaim a meaning lest the story fail. Only in this section is suspense carried by a deeper current, the movement of human emotion.

The strange thing is that this break-through into actual experience should leave Sansom's writing not richer, but thinner than before. The abundance of sensations is no gain. In throwing off Kafka, he has deprived himself of a ready-made ordering principle, the intellectual form that the latter's style provides. He freed himself with a vengeance; in his eagerness to write a novel redeeming experience, he cast away the earlier concepts, forgetting to provide any of his own. But there is not only an intellectual vacancy; *The Body* lacks directness, it comes at experience obliquely, from the surface, with a glancing blow and a shower of words that seldom pierce through. The oblique is an endemic disease of contemporary English fiction, it is the style of the lowered capacity for life, and *The Body,* like all the other novels, is thoroughly spotted with it.

Except for *Two Worlds and Their Ways,* which is so thoroughly spotted that it no longer shows. Ivy Compton-Burnett breaks all the categories by exceeding them. She has never had to go looking for renewal, being a placid writer, content with her corner of the novel; her contentment shows in every line. There is none of Sansom's distraction in *Two Worlds and Their Ways,* no casting about for effect. Nothing occurs to her that does not have effect ingrained. Completely the artificial writer, she does without the artifice of highlights, pacing, purple or intellectual passages, scenery, descriptions; her manner comes naturally to her in a steady trickle, and there her commerce with nature

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ends. There is probably no other living English writer who, page for page, can afford to be as simple as she. The fact that this simplicity is stilted is beside the point. She is perfectly at ease on stilts, and could keep her balance nowhere else.

Each sentence in this novel is an epigram or is meant to be, and the whole book is a series of conversations in which these sentences are exchanged. It is an autistic language not meant to resemble much of living speech, and making no claim to a major style; it is even austere and, in its disregard for usual cadences, naive. This naivete saves it from being unreadably sophisticated, and as the conversations run their course there is a further surprise in the number of impressions, characterizations, turns of action and bursts of chilly fun that come through, where none would be expected. Minor art could not be smaller or more successful.

It is impossible to think of Ivy Compton-Burnett switching traditions in middle career. Her tradition, the comedy of English manners, is inexhaustible at the rate she draws on it. She is supposed to be acid, malicious, merciless, wicked—which, to those who take these manners seriously, she may well be (her whole substance is the naughty hypothetical, "What if people really were so outspoken?"); but as her work is deliberately scaled to the tea party, only cups and saucers can get hurt.

Two Worlds and Their Ways is about something (parents, relations, servants, governesses, children who cheat at school, illegitimacy, stolen earrings) but it needn't be.

Isaac Rosenfeld

PERMUTATIONS OF A MYTH

THE HERO WITH A THOUSAND FACES. By Joseph Campbell. Pantheon Books. $4.00.

It is not altogether clear to whom this work is being addressed; much of it will undoubtedly appear rather elementary to professionals in the various fields on which it depends for its method. It will offend those professional anthropologists who maintain that nobody can possibly know anything about human society without having spent a few months in the New Guinea bush. And in its consistent reliance on Freud and Jung it will enrage the psychoanalysts who believe that nobody can understand anything about the individual psyche without a degree in medicine. What damnation it will bring down on Mr. Campbell's head for its theological digressions from someone like Monsignor Fulton Sheen

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one dreads to contemplate. Although Mr. Campbell is a writer of remarkable erudition, the truth is that the task which he has here undertaken is larger than could have been perfectly accomplished by any one man. First of all, the book belongs to a field which in our day has become inexhaustible—namely, that of comparative mythology, which is perhaps an inadequate label in view of everything which that field has now come to include. It is inexhaustible simply because the human race has managed to endure so long and in so many different places. For example, Mr. Campbell happens to be specially interested in Oriental myth and religion and quite understandably indulges this interest at the expense of other important cultural areas. But to have given equal attention to the Greek, the Celtic and the Teutonic areas would have resulted in a work three or four times longer than the present one. But in addition to this merely quantitative difficulty there is its method. In his attempt to interpret what he calls the "monomyth" (a useful coinage of Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* to designate the basic universality of the heroic pattern) Mr. Campbell is necessarily drawn into all of the more important departments of modern knowledge. Since the Renaissance our knowledge, like everything else, has undergone an ever increasing process of atomization; the Logos has been broken down into a rich confusion of "ologies." Anyone in our time striving to construct a unified picture of man in his individual, social and cosmic relationships is confronted with nothing less than the necessity of studying each of these categories of knowledge and of reconciling them with one another. This also is manifestly too much for one man. Mr. Campbell refers often to the old Gnostic concept of the Cosmic Egg upon the waters, whose breaking was responsible for all the manifold forms of creation. Most of us are familiar with this myth through the nursery rhyme of Humpty Dumpty and his irremediable predicament. Perhaps we say everything when we admit that Mr. Campbell can hardly be expected to succeed completely where all the king's horses and all the king's men failed.

We must also immediately admit that Mr. Campbell has performed an extraordinary job of synthesis for which we all must be grateful. The only full-length book in English with which it may be compared (if we exclude Robert Graves' *The White Goddess* as having a different intention and much narrower scope) is Lord Raglan's crotchety and ill-tempered but at the same time handy treatment of the same subject in *The Hero*. But Mr. Campbell is concerned not only with detaching what might be called the General Morphology of the heroic myth throughout the ages but also with determining its meaning on several levels of interpretation.

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Part I, entitled "The Adventure of the Hero," is divided into three chapters, the first of which deals with the *departure* of the hero from the land of his birth to the strange new land—the passage from adolescence to maturity, from a lower to a higher order of existence, according to the particular level of interpretation. The second chapter describes the variety of "trials" both physical and mental involved in his *initiation* into this world and subsequent Atonement with the Father. The third deals with his return *and reintegration with society* after his triumphant journey into the realm of the impersonal and universal. It must be stated that Mr. Campbell does not reduce this process to a rigid and undeviating pattern; he admits of all the modifications of form, development and resolution which are the results of different cultural emphases. The second half of the book is more philosophical and theological in content and relates the more advanced world-teachers like Buddha, Christ and Mohammed to the general pattern.

Whom does Mr. Campbell address? Surely none of the specialists on whose fields he is compelled to poach. He is obviously first and foremost a literary man, as his predilection for literary sources indicates. And it is unquestionably the alert, general reader, especially of modern literature, who will find his work as useful as it is fascinating. We all talk a great deal about the Myth nowadays. With Yeats, Joyce, Mann, Eliot, and Pound exerting their influence all these years, how could we do otherwise? But what we have long needed is just such an informative, orderly and reasonable analysis of the subject as the present work.

In the closing paragraphs of the eloquent final chapter "The Hero

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Today" Mr. Campbell makes what is such a definitive statement of the whole *raison d'être* of his work that it must be quoted:

The descent of the Occidental sciences from the heavens to the earth (from seventeenth-century astronomy to nineteenth-century biology), and their concentration today, at last, on man himself (in twentieth-century anthropology and psychology), mark the path of a prodigious transfer of the focal point of human wonder. Not the animal world, not the plant world, nor the miracle of the spheres, but *man himself is now the crucial mystery.* (The italics are mine.)

William Troy

THE PERPETUAL DREYFUSARD

JEAN BAROIS. By Roger Martin du Gard. Viking Press. $3.50

Jean Barois was published by the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1913, thirteen years after the last convulsions of the Dreyfus case. The *Affaire* was dead, as Peguy maintained with some bitterness; it could no longer divide France. The spirit of many disabused intellectuals who had given themselves to the case (a commitment, which, for a few, like Peguy, like Bernard Lazare, was an attempt to raise morality over politics by the force of individual conscience) had been reduced to vain and singularly old fashioned literary attitudes. The N.R.F., already the most powerful new force in French literary life, represented, by definition, a departure from *"la littérature combattante."* The church had become officially reconciled, while the conversion of such figures as Claudel and Peguy tended to subdue the free-thinking movement, with all its paraphernalia of crises and torments.

Roger Martin du Gard, an atheist, and an N.R.F. hopeful at thirty-two, made a second novel out of two late-nineteenth-century phenomena, the general loss of faith between 1880 and 1906, and the Dreyfus case. Martin du Gard's naturalistic style, reminiscent of Zola's, and his belief in what his hero defines as "that slow but glorious progress of humanity towards a better world," stamp him as a creature of the late nineteenth century. As a novel, *Jean Barois* appears today to be a minor literary work, but as a tract it is quite exceptional, especially for its 150 some pages that deal with the Dreyfus case as the *crise de conscience* that so altered the course and composition of the French intellectual class. *Jean Barois* is an intellectual's breviary of idealism, whose heroes

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(though attenuated by a synthetic process that makes Jean Barois both a Peguy and a Renan) reproduce the rhythm, if not the individualistic quality, of that period. It is in the best tradition of French pamphleteering that this mixture of uniquely French quarrels, of value-judgments on science and religion in terms that have long since ceased to exist, of moral issues above politics, and political issues beyond the reach of morality, should have such an undiluted and sometimes immediate fragrance.

Jean Barois' tortuous emancipation from Catholicism, his adulation of science, and his subsequent degeneration as a rational being, occupy the greater part of the novel, and as such, offer little interest, in terms of ideas, except to collectors of the myths and mottos of nineteenth-century free thought. Jean Barois is the Catholic son of an atheist doctor, the traditional father-symbol of the free-thinking movement. His liberation also goes by way of medicine. He begins by questioning the truth of the scriptures according to scientific and historical criteria, rejects the "symbolist compromise," or interpretation, offered him, and finally accepts what is in effect a vulgarization of Renan's religion of science and progress. He joins a group of young idealist atheists, synthetic characters, like Woldsmuth, a Jewish chemist moved by suffering Jewry, —a caricature of Bernard Lazare. All are followers of their elder, Luce, who represents the "spirit of tolerance" in free thought, and who serves, quite properly, to make of their *Dreyfusarisme,* not a rational movement, but a romantic, idealised enterprise.

This group's polemic of participation in the Dreyfus case is the real substance of Martin du Gard's novel. Barois, Luce, and the others, collaborate in a periodical, "The Sower," (a metaphor, which, with its affiliates, the grain, the furrow, the reaper, and even *La Semeuse* of French bank notes, is currency of the period) a year after Dreyfus' sentence to life imprisonment. Despite a five year error in chronology, "The Sower" approximates Peguy's *Cahiers de la Quinzaine,* and its collaborators, the first intellectual *Dreyfusards* in France.

The *Dreyfusards,* the group around Peguy, were partisans of what Peguy himself called (after his conversion) the "republican mystique,"— a romantic notion to which many of their own generation of intellectuals, and a majority of the French people seemed indifferent. Unlike Jaurès and Hervé, the so-called "anarchists" who denied that treason could be a crime, they were partisans of truth and justice in terms of the law of the republic.

If *Jean Barois* has any interest today for American intellectuals it is in the parallel between the state of the literary mind at the turn of

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the nineteenth century and the situation today. The Nazi occupation created another *cas de conscience,* and a large number of young French intellectuals in a rush of idealism, declared themselves to be both "responsible," and "committed." It is not surprising that Peguy became the ideological symbol of the French resistance, and Peguy's heroes of the *Affaire,* "The perpetual *Dreyfusards,* mystic *Dreyfusards,* usually obscure, usually poor . . . those who were silent; only their words counted," are in their own way the unhappy heroes of a greater part of the new literature in France today. Except for the doctrinaire Communist, the young resistant writer has fallen into a tragic obsolescence, paralysed by the nostalgia for a cause that might be defendable on intellectual and artistic grounds.

Patricia Blake

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VARIETY

REPORT FROM THE ACADEMY: HISTORY AS IT IS WRIT

No event in modern historiography equals the impact which occurred when the Papal Archives were thrown open to Leopold Von Ranke. That this meant the end of the Popular History was overlooked. Two world wars finished off what Von Ranke had begun, and perversely enough the historian virtually returned to his Renaissance role, becoming not so much the chronicler of social structure, as its accountant. The Academy was founded.

We move today into a narrow, congested plane of action, wherein synthesis gives way to statistic and monograph. The fields are sub-divided, shaved into narrow strips that are scarcely observable to the naked eye, so that all that remains is a dim shape reflecting itself and nothing more. Forced under the pressure of the Academy to produce learned little papers, the modern historian will gather with his colleagues perhaps once or twice a year to present his material. He dare not expose any attempt at generalization to the high-powered battery of specialists who sit about, fearful lest he be caught up on a stray figure, the unread article which should have been mentioned, the perpetual roll of new work in his field which must constantly be tracked down and eliminated in footnotes. Like the Stendhal hero, in the midst of Waterloo he seeks Waterloo.

Venturing out of the Academy from the closed circle, he has little space to breathe more than the congested air of the technician, becomes a mechanism aware of the correct catalogues to approach under a given subject, a compiler of index cards. The group of historians working on the story of the American Air Force in the European Theater compiled tons of data, but sought little more than the tabulation of source upon source. In such a venture thousands upon thousands of documents are processed by a dozen different groups of specialists till the work is complete, after which it is thrown upon the doorstep of eventual MILITARY HISTORY. It is a strange process, where the worker is no longer alienated from the means of production, but becomes himself a fragment of the thing produced. Muffling the impact of saturation bombing with his material, the historian eludes the modern terror, creating for himself a set of relatively simple values, wherein the irrational act becomes rational once it is graphed.

Equally alarming is the modern trend toward individualized business history. Such a corporation as

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the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company hires a renowned academician, sets him up neatly with virtually unlimited funds and hordes of eager young graduate students. Throwing open to him the books and records, the historian is startled at first by the realization that no pressure is put upon him. Facts need not be whitewashed, the whole story can be told in the most minute aspect. Gone are the days of the old Ida Tarbell trustbusters. Standard Oil becomes an American institution, giving up its ugly libidinous infancy for a stable maturity.

This field opens attractively to the younger students. Well-paid, it offers to the beginner compensation at least equal to the instructorship hopefully attained in a Midwestern college or the larger metropolitan universities. If, for example, the U.S. Steel Corporation works out its plan for such a project, it will release upwards from one hundred thousand dollars (tax exempt) to be spent on research and research workers. It is clean work, where the trees are slowly counted till the final day when the entire forest may be assessed. Till that day comes the historian maintains his objectivity, taking leave of this world till all sources have been checked. Becoming a sifter and refiner, he approaches society in much the same way as some modern critics approach *Finnegans Wake*— "after such know-

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ledge, what forgiveness?" He must so place himself in relation to his subject that perspective no longer exists. Like Marquis James's estimate of the insurance man, when he speaks of the future, he must mean today.

The more modern society tends toward that which is fearful and murderous, the more is it institutionalized by the Academy. The day of the dilettante in history is over; what exists now is a private world that turns in upon itself. At some future date one can perhaps expect to see a history of Buchenwald, where the placement of the barbed wire is noted, the number of guards and machine-guns accurately counted, the mechanism of the gas-chambers set down. It will be an all-inclusive work, where only the mass graves are missing.

So sensitivized has the technology of history become that the historian is numb before it. The apparatus has taken and swallowed him. He struggles with time, keeps Gibbon and Burckhardt on his library shelves, promises to round out the gaps in his own knowledge. But there is time only for committees, a hurried research paper or at best the editing of the papers of a New Deal bureaucrat. When the next sabbatical comes he will be on hire, for there are no more intangibles in history. Reflection is sombre, and each month the journals and the bulletins arrive fresh on his desk.

Seated before them for a moment, he may become an intellectual Walter Mitty, doing battle with Mathiez and Aulard, grand concepts rolling across his perception. But later there will be more time, for after all, the story of Swift and Company is valid ECONOMIC HISTORY, and the entrance of a student sends him back to his mail.

Wallace Markfield

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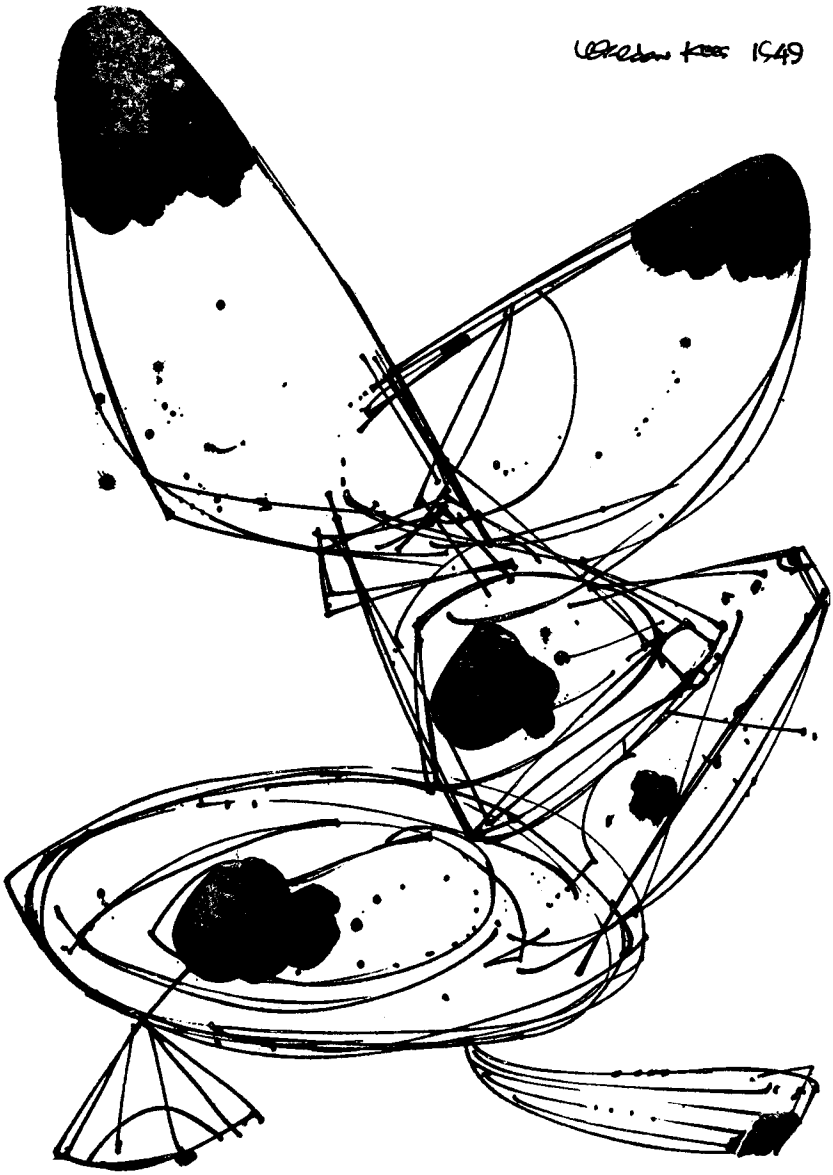

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